Uncle Earle's Monopoly.

By ANNE FRANCES COLE.

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UNCLE EARLE'S MONOPOLY

BY

ANNE FRANCES COLE

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1899

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TO THE
GIRLS AND BOYS OF
"NIPNET."

CONTENTS.

CHAPTER.		PAGE.
I.	The Beeches	1
II.	The Boys	13
III.	Deerfoot Falls	19
IV.	Castle Silent	29
V.	A Fishing Expedition	43
VI.	Crowning the Knights	56
VII.	Don Fulano	69
VIII.	A Scheme that was Grandmothered	82
IX.	Nelson's "Portyare"	95
X.	The Challenge	106
XI.	Allan's Conspiracy	122
XII.	Vivian's Counterplot	135
XIII.	Ralph	140
XIV.	Digging for Bait	152
XV.	The Tower Room	162
XVI.	Nelson's Return	169
XVII.	His Better Self	179
XVIII.	Miriam's Success	190
XIX.	Dinner al Fresco	203
XX.	The Horse Show	216
XXI.	An Expedition Ghostward	228
XXII.	Final Exploit of the Knights	238
XXIII.	The Raymond Crest	248
XXIV.	The Ghost Materializes	255
XXV.	The End of the Fairy Tale	266

UNCLE EARLE'S MONOPOLY.

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CHAPTER I.

THE BEECHES.

Nelson Craft sat on a nail keg outside of the carriage house door, reading the Mildam Gazette. The paper which he held was a week old; but, judging by the close attention which he gave; and his low chuckle of satisfaction now and then, it was evident that the news had by no means lost its flavor.

Nelson was general factotum at The Beeches. He was practically alone in the world—the rest of the Craft family, with the exception of one sister, having moved to the far west when he was a mere boy. He had lived with the Howe family for many years making himself valuable from the first, not only by his reliability but by a certain shrewdness of management and quickness in emergencies soon recognized and appreciated by his employers.

It was natural, under such circumstances, that the family interests should be his interests, and

that locked in his true heart should be more than one secret which the gossips of Mildam, in spite of all their attempts, failed to discover. Why had the present Mr. Howe never married? What had become of Miss Margaret's lover? These and other questions it was confidently believed Nelson could answer if he would, but he would not.

Two paragraphs in the paper pleased him mightily; the first one read:—

"We understand that The Beeches will not be occupied this summer. Mr. Earle Howe, his sister, Miss Margaret Howe, and their niece, Miss Ruth Sherwood, will sail for Europe shortly. Miss Sherwood has just recovered from a severe attack of the grippe and her physicians have ordered her abroad for change of air."

The other paragraph was:—

"The lodge of the Castle has been enlarged and thoroughly equipped, and we hear it is to be occupied by Mr. Raymond during the fishing and hunting season. If he never intends to complete the Castle, he might better, we should think, dispose of it to some enterprising person who would finish the structure and reclaim the place which seems to be fast going to ruin and is no credit to the owner."

"That means," said Nelson, with another chuckle, "that the editor of this paper has a commission to buy the place himself at a low figger; but he won't make nothin' by tryin' to

run it down, and Mr. Hugh Raymond ain't a goin' to sell out to any such kind of a man anyhow."

He did not continue his reflections, being at that moment summoned to the house, where Mr. Howe, who had not gone to Europe,and Miss Margaret, who had not gone either, were consulting with their mother—the dearest old lady in the world—as to the best means of restoring Ruth Sherwood to health in the shortest possible time.

The house, with its broad piazzas and hospitable door, had consisted originally of a large hall with spacious rooms opening on either side, a story above this and then the big attic with its sloping roof and space for storing old-time treasures. Mr. Howe's father had built an addition of dining-room and library, with its second story, on the eastern side of the house, and Mr. Howe himself had built a corner octagonal room with tower rooms above; so that now The Beeches was capable of entertaining a number of guests at one time and fortunate indeed were all lovers of the country and of good cheer who were bidden to this mountain retreat.

Mr. Howe had gone to his desk in the octagonal room, which was his own especial bookroom and den, when Nelson tapped at the door.

"Come in,Nelson," called Mr. Howe's hearty voice, "sit down; there are a good many things

to be talked over and I need your advice and help."

"Guess I'd better go down an' help the editor of the Mildam write a new paragraph for his paper," said Nelson.

"We were going to Europe, you know," said Mr. Howe smiling; "but the doctors decided that Miss Ruth must have mountain air, and where can better mountain air be found than right here?"

"Nowheres in the world, Mr. Howe, nowheres in the world;—" the two men—one traveled and experienced, the other thoroughly provincial—had but one unalterable opinion on this subject.

"It's the stables I want to talk about," said Mr. Howe. "Miss Ruth will be getting better soon and we must have a lot of young folks up here to make up for this disappointment of not going to Europe. I am sending to Kentucky now for a number of horses and I imagine we shall need some changes in the stables."

"How many horses, all told?"

"Well, if there are ten or a dozen young folks how many horses would you say, Nelson?"

"Wal, I reckon—" there was a twinkle in the old man's eye—"if t'was anybody else, four'd be enough; but as it's Mr. Howe t'wouldn't surprise me much if he sent for one apiece."

"What I want to know—" Mr. Howe leaned

forward with a confidential air—"what I want to know is, do you think we can manage so many?"

Nelson was used to being consulted; but there was always a fresh pleasure in being treated with such consideration by Mr. Howe, and for a moment his feelings overcame him so that he did not answer, then looking up he said:

"Wal, if you kin manage the young folks I reckon I kin look after the horses."

"Good!" answered Mr. Howe; "you look the thing over and let me know what will be needed. Then you will have to pick out some good steady stable men to help you."

"Trust me for that, an' glad enough they'll be to get the job."

When Mr. Howe returned to the library he was delighted to find that Ruth had been helped down stairs and was lying on the lounge near the open fire. The windows were open to let in the fresh air, which still held a subtle chill; for Ruth and the others, who had just come from the city house, found a cheery blaze pleasant.

"Isn't it ridiculous, Uncle Earle, perfectly ridiculous, that I have to lie here. And I'm so weak; weak as a kitten."

"You will soon gain strength here," said her Aunt Margaret.

"I never was ill before that I can remember."

"No, dear, the little baby illnesses are all that you have ever had."

"Then I don't see why I don't get on faster."

"You are getting cross, Ruth," said her grandmother smiling. "It is the best sign in the world for an invalid; we shall soon have you up now."

"Yes, and then," said Mr. Howe, "I know all the little coaxings and enticings that will be lavished upon me to get me to change my mind about Europe; but really, Ruth, I cannot make any change now for this season; we must see what is the very best thing that can be done here."

"You have a plan for something, Uncle Earle, tell me what it is;" and Ruth braced herself on her elbow to turn and look into her uncle's face.

"Now you are so much better, perhaps you can make a plan yourself."

"No, indeed, nobody can make such lovely plans as you; what is it?"

"You know that Sidney and Ralph are not going to Europe if we do not go."

"Oh, Uncle Earle, aren't the boys going?"

"No, they are coming up here."

"And then," eagerly, "I can ride and drive and go boating all that I wish, can't I?"

"Don't you think—" it was Mrs. Howe who spoke—"that it would be pleasant to have some girls too?"

"What girls?" a trifle of impatience in the tone.

"We were thinking," said Mrs. Howe, "that you might like to ask Vivian—"

"Oh! Vivian wouldn't come; she will be going to Bar Harbor."

"You can ask her and Helen and perhaps Miriam."

"And might I ask Tina Wright, Aunt Margaret?"

"Certainly if you wish to. She would not have occurred to me, but I like Tina."

"No more talking before luncheon," said Mr. Howe; "you must rest now, and then if you do not feel like writing I am sure your Aunt Margaret will send your invitations for you."

"Oh! I'm quite up to it now. I'd like to send them myself."

"Very well; now I will go and write to the boys to come up a week from Friday for a day or two. We must not leave them out; they will need some comrades too if there are to be so many girls."

The letters of invitation were sent that same day and the replies came very promptly. Ruth read them all eagerly and then handed them to her aunt who was sitting near her.

"Shall I ask your uncle to come and hear them?" asked Miss Howe; "he is talking with Nelson in the study."

"Yes, and please ask grandmama too; she will be interested."

The first letter was from Christina Wright:—

"MY DEAR RUTH:

"Mama says I may go, and I think it is so sweet of you to ask me when there are ever so many nicer girls. Fred says I can be the sky terrier of the party, but my curly hair doesn't look quite so bad as it did. I was anxious to have it cut again; but Fred says I don't look so dumpy with it back, and he knows now that my eyes are gray instead of green. I am so happy about going that I can hardly stop to answer your letter. I'm getting my things ready and I'll remember all you told me to bring. Mama says I must send her compliments to your aunt and thank her and you for giving me such a pleasure, and I am

"Your very loving,
"TINA."

"P. S. I want to say that it is so good of you to ask me, and I will never be jealous of the other girls again."

Ruth held out her hand for the letter.—"Dear little Tina," she said; "I am so fond of her. Read Miriam's next, will you Aunt Margaret? It is rather mourn ful; and we'll save Vivian's for the last." Miriam wrote:

"MY DEAREST RUTH:—

"I can hardly believe I am to see you so soon again,and that we are to spend some weeks together. Only yesterday I was wishing I could have something quite out of the usual line,and now comes your lovely invitation. Anybody but you would think me dreadfully wicked, Ruth; but you know I always tell you all my troubles, and writing to you comes as natural as talking. I don't know what the matter is--I've been so cross lately. I have really nothing to complain of, and yet my temper is out of sorts a good deal of the time. What do you suppose can be the reason? I try so hard to have a sweet temper, Ruth, you know I do.

"I wish you were right here with me for a good

long chat, and I can almost imagine that you are, for I am sitting alone in my own room, writing. You spoke about my music in your letter; but I haven't done much with it, and I feel disappointed, too, that I do not make better progress. Mother said she would call me early enough to practice before breakfast, but I go to bed too late for that. I read rather late you know, and am sleepy in the morning. And the Sketch Club? well, it languishes. Through the day I hear so many times: 'You ought to do this, you ought to do that!' I am quite distracted. If I were the Pope, my dear, I would excommunicate that horrid little word, and I can't see why mother ought always to be doing so many things as she does. It seems to me she is wearing herself all out. Mr. Sanborn said to me the other day: 'My dear, your mother is the finest woman that I know;' and on my way home when I stopped with a message for Johanna she said: 'Sure then your mother's an angel, bless her.' It must be all right; but I cannot help wishing that for once she and papa and I could do things just because we wanted to and not because we ought.

"When papa read your letter he said at once: 'Miriam must accept this invitation.' It will be delightful and we shall get on nicely. It does seem too good to be true and I just give myself a hard pinch to see whether I am dreaming. Still it will be safe to say that you may expect me on the day appointed.

"Your devoted friend,
"Miriam Snowdon."

"Poor Miriam," said Ruth laughing, "she doesn't want to do anything but read all day long, and then she wonders why she does not get along in other things."

"We will keep her out of doors too much for that here," said Mr. Howe.

Next came Helen's letter:—

"It is impossible, my dear Ruth, to refuse such a lovely invitation. Fannie wished me to go to the White Sulphur Springs with auntie and herself, after I had been with papa and mother to Saratoga; but I should rather come to you, and all the home people are willing. You know I am so tall now that my gowns are to be almost all new, and I feel quite grown up in them. Father says if I go to a fashionable watering place with Fannie I will have to act like a young lady,and he is glad of this opportunity to have a good rollicking time on the hills instead. He knew your uncle, Mr. Howe, at college, and has told me a number of things about him which make me think he must be almost the best man in the world.

"Mother is writing to your aunt, but says I must send her best love to you with mine. We are both so glad that you are better again.

"Always yours fondly,
"Helen DeLancey."

VIVIAN RUSSELL TO RUTH SHERWOOD:—

"What a dear little puss you are, my dear Ruth. Only to think of it, only to dream of it! what a Kerry dancing there will be when we lads and lassies all get together. No, you modest daisy, there is no other trip or invitation good enough to keep me from coming to you. Who ever heard of such a merry time as you propose being refused for a common place stay at Newport or Bar Harbor? You should have heard me laugh over your letter. It was like your own thoughtful self to tell me exactly what to bring; but when I read about the shoes, the suit for climbing and all the rest of it I laughed until mama came into my room to ask, 'Vivian what is the matter now?' I told her it was the loveliest invitation in the world and she must on no account say no to my accepting; but the letter made me think of a boarding school catalogue which says, so many hats, so many handkerchiefs, so many aprons, etc., all marked in plain letters with the owner's name. After mama had read your letter she bent down her handsome head to kiss me and said it was a long time to spare her daughter.

There was a glisten of a tear in her eye but the twinkle came back as she said she did not know as she could trust me so soon after my last naughtiness. It was only one of my brilliant ideas successfully worked out, as you shall hear. You remember that dreadfully stupid Mr. York? Well, he has taken upon himself to intrude very often of late upon papa and spoils a good many of his evenings. He shakes hands with mama and speaks to me as if I were a babe of ten, and then invariably takes the same seat in front of papa and begins one of his interminable harangues about either tariff or finance or civil service reform, of which of course I know nothing, but I could see he didn't either. One evening when I knew he would come I put on my black silk dress, did my hair up to look tall, and taking the Evening Post sat down between papa's chair and the one he was sure to take. Papa took off his glasses and looked at me. Then he said: 'Vivian you don't look natural. You would better put on a bib or apron and come and sit on the arm of my chair.' 'No thank you, papa,' I answered, 'I think it is quite time I read the papoes.' In came Mr. York and unsuspectingly took his old seat. Papa was deeply interested in his reading and before Mr. York could really begin one of his harangues I asked him a question about the tariff, making sure I had a hard one. I should not have known any better if he had told me all wrong; but papa, who knows everything, was right there and he had to be careful to be correct. I kept asking questions and he grew more and more mixed up until I was afraid papa would send me away and I said, 'I do want, Mr. York, to know more on these subjects and you lecture so beautifully to papa that, if you have no objection, the next time you come I'd like to ask you some things on the Immigration question and take notes.' He left at nine o'clock instead of eleven and papa has had a chance to finish the book he is reading.

"My dear what made you ask me at the same time with that funny little Tina Wright? I'm afraid I can't help teasing her however hard I try.

"Yesterday was my eighteenth birthday. I am al-

most afraid to tell for fear the other girls will think me too old to be one of the party. But I don't look old, that's a comfort, and I'm going to stay young, I'm not going to have a beau until I'm forty.

"Yours ever,
"VIVIAN RUSSELL."

CHAPTER II.

THE BOYS.

The boys—Sidney Talbot and Ralph Wayne—came in due time and with them was Mr. Howard Parkinson, a friend of their Uncle Earle whom they had met on the train. He had heard something from Mr. Howe about vacation plans and was keenly interested in all they expected to do in the summer.

As they left the station Sidney asked: "You have never been here before, Mr. Parkinson?"

"No, although I have hoped many times to come. Why did your uncle choose this rather inaccessible place?"

"Oh! he didn't choose it. His grandfather built the tanneries up here by the falls, when there was plenty of hemlock bark to use for the tanning, and then he built the homestead. My grandmother lives here most of the time now ;she thinks there is no place like it."

"I guess Uncle Earle agrees with her," said Ralph.

The Beeches—three miles from the town and the station—was reached by a tolerably good and very picturesque road,which wound up a gradual

ascent to a point from which there was a beautiful view. The eye wandered over tops of plumey pines to half cultivated fields below, and then southward to mountain peaks blue and billowy in the distance. A little farther on the travelers were shut in by protecting trees, and then they came suddenly upon The Beeches with its stately pillared porch facing the sunset.

"Fine old place," said Mr. Parkinson, "and this is just the time to arrive. What a glorious sky."

"Yes," said Sidney, "the mountains are very jolly from here."

Mr. Parkinson's eyes came back from the hills and rested on the house. He noted the piazzas, the tower at one side and the eastern addition. "Somebody told me," he said, "that this house was too mixed in its architecture; I like it."

"Oh," laughed Sidney, "Uncle Earle is used to having it criticised; but he says he hopes that when we build we will get houses half as comfortable and convenient."

Out came Mr. Howe with his hearty welcome. His manner of shaking hands seemed to say: "How are you, how have you been, and how are you going to be?" so warm and cordial it was.

After dinner the evening was given chiefly to the discussion of the various schemes to be carried out during the vacation. Mr. Parkinson was greatly amused and entertained.

"You're going back on your principles, Howe," he said, "going back on your principles."

"In what way?" asked Mr. Howe.

"Why you, who are a rabid anti-monopolist, are to have a big monopoly of young folks here all summer. I must say I envy you," he added, and all through the season whenever he wrote to Mr. Howe he never failed to inquire after that "Monopoly."

"So the girls are all coming," said Sidney the next morning. "I wish we were as sure of the boys."

"Why, Ernest Goodwin is sure enough," answered Ralph, "and you don't mind if you have him, do you?"

Sidney bit his lip, and before he could answer, Mr. Howe, whose quick eye saw his annoyance, said: "And who do you most wish to have come, Ralph?"

"Allan Paige," was the prompt reply; "he is a real good fellow and very fond of me."

Sidney turned away, and Mr. Howe, who had not known it before, began to see that there was no great amount of cordiality between these two cousins.

Perhaps no one except their Aunt Margaret, who had seen more of them when they were together, knew that Sidney Talbot was Mr. Howe's favorite nephew; for he was truly interested in all who in any way belonged to him,

and he was accustomed to make excuses for Ralph, because he said the only son of an indulgent mother labored under serious disadvantages and was apt to grow selfish and self-centered without knowing it.

Ralph had not the advantage of Sidney's fine presence; he was shorter, more squarely built, and, although he had a good head and well cut features, he took no pains to cultivate the pleasant expression that was necessary in order to make him really agreeable.

Sidney had intended to talk further with his uncle; but he was glad to take advantage of an interruption and go to Mrs. Howe's room instead.

"I'm cross, grandmama dear," he said, throwing himself on the floor at her feet and putting his head in her lap.

"With yourself or with somebody else?" she asked, bending lovingly over the dark hair and lifting the usually merry face so that she could see the trouble in the deep brown eyes.

"You know there's Ernest," he said.

"And who is Ernest?" she asked.

"Why, Ernest Goodwin, don't you remember? He wrote all my letters and was no end good to me after I broke my wrist at football. I've never been able to really do anything for him since, and I meant to ask Uncle Earle if I could invite him up here instead of one of the other fellows; but Ralph takes things so for granted, and—"

"Tell me about Ernest," she said, "and what made him so good to you?"

"Why you see," said Sidney, "he is little and extra careful not to do anything out of the way. That brought some of the boys down on him, and I stood up for him, that's all. But I can tell you lots more about him; his father is dead and his mother has just enough to send him to school and college if they pinch and contrive all through. He told me he thought his mother ought to use the money for herself and let him go into a store, but she has set her heart on college, and he is wonderfully bright, I think.

"But there's another trouble," he continued; "if Ernest stays home, he can do very well about clothes; but if he comes up here I don't see how he can fix it. He's awfully proud and I can't manage that again."

"Did you manage it once?"

"Yes, it was this way. I had two good suits that I had just grown out of, and I asked him if he would play younger brother to me and wear them. I said I was fond of the suits and I didn't want to have them just given away. Ralph remembered them and he came to me and asked if I didn't think it was a bad plan to give a boy better things than he could buy, it might make him discontented."

"What did you say to that?"

"I told him he'd better not eat his Thanks-

giving dinner for fear he'd be discontented with everyday fare afterward. Then I went into the next room and there was Ernest. He couldn't help hearing every word that was said, and he was terribly cut up, you may be sure. No, I can't do that again."

"How would this do?" said Mrs. Howe.

"What, grandmama?"

"There is a nice young girl here, a farmer's daughter, who wants to go to the city and learn to be a stenographer and typewriter. I have peasuaded her so far not to go because she has no friends in town; but I have promised to help her and pay her board if she will wait until I can find the right place. Now if Mrs. Goodwin would consent to take her to board and look after her a little, I could send a check in advance, and then Ernest's mother could perhaps fit him out to come up here."

"Oh, I'm sure she would!" And then Sidney, whose keen sense of the fitness of things made him realize what a beautiful act this was, wanted to say more; but he could not, and with a simple, "Thank you, grandmama," he went to find his uncle and make his request about Ernest.

CHAPTER III.

DEERFOOT FALLS.

When the boys went back to the city, Ralph was commissioned to take Mr. Howe's invitation to Allan, and Sidney was to ask Ernest. Sidney's invitation was accepted at once, and Allan told Ralph that he would accept as soon as he could get his life insured against the bears and bandits of the mountain region.

One member of the party, not yet mentioned, was Mr. Grafton, a boyish looking but most thorough tutor, who was to help Sidney and Allan make up their conditions for college.

"Yes," he said to Sidney, "I shall be very glad to go, and I suppose we can make up a very fair ball team up there, can't we?"

"My uncle says there is to be no ball playing this summer."

"Why—why, what sort of a man is he?" asked the astonished tutor.

"Oh," laughed Sidney, "non-athletic you know, an indoor sort of a man."

"Well, I should say so; but we'll see what we can do to change his mind."

When school closed Mr. Grafton went up with

the boys to The Beeches and very much astonished was he when he first met Mr. Howe. Instead of the elderly, somewhat bent, mild looking old gentleman that he had pictured to himself, he was confronted by a tall, erect, vigorous man whose rich black hair showed only the first suspicion of gray, and whose keen dark eye could easily detect smaller foibles than an over devotion to football. Every line and motion told, too, of the good effects of outdoor air and exercise, and before the season was over the younger man reluctantly confessed that there were some circumstances when his pet form of athletics might be dispensed with without serious injury being the result.

Miss Margaret Howe was a great contrast to her brother in appearance, although her manner and expression made her seem very like him at times. She was not tall; but she carried herself so well that she looked above the medium height. Her luxuriant fair hair had a way of waving and curling about her temples that was Ruth's delight, and the deep blue eyes were always full of tenderness for the motherless maiden and of welcome to that maiden's friends.

The girls were to arrive the day after the boys came and great was Ruth's excitement as, seated with Miss Howe in the carriage and escorted by the boys on their wheels, she started for the station to meet Vivian, Helen, Miriam and Tina,

who under the escort of friends going further north, were to arrive that afternoon. Ralph was the first to give notice of the incoming train but it was Allan and Sidney who stood ready to give all the assistance in their power to the maidens who were arriving.

Out they came with faces beaming and hands full.

"Girls always have such a lot of trash," said Ralph, rather disgustedly to Sidney, who stood beside him.

"Seventeen trunks apiece certain," said Sidney good humoredly; "but my, look at that!"

Among the trunks that were thrown from the baggage car was a large one of peculiar shape, rounded at the corners and on top, and evidently made as nearly as possible on the principle of a rubber ball. It struck the platform, then jumped over a hat box, landed on a fruit crate, and at last settled down between a cask and a wheelbarrow.

"Oh my! Oh dear! Oh!" gasped Tina, while Miriam and Helen were nearly convulsed with laughter.

"Is that your trunk, Tina?" asked Helen as soon as she could speak. "Tina is that it?"

"Yes that's mine," said Tina. "Fred said, you know, that he'd have one made for me this time that wouldn't break."

"Shall we have it put on the baggage wagon,

Miss Tina," asked Allen, "or do you think it would prefer going alone?" But Tina did not reply. She thought for an instant of what she had come to believe to be a fatal truth, that she was born to be teased, and then Sidney led her to the carriage where Miss Howe was waiting.

The horses were fresh and in a very short time took them to The Beeches, tired enough to take kindly to the "early to bed" which was Mrs. Howe's suggestion in the evening.

There were so many delightful things to do, they could scarcely make up their minds the next morning which to attempt first; but at last it was voted to go to Beacon Top and come back by way of Deerfoot Falls.

It was rather a long walk; but they were all in the spirit of it, and they climbed merrily to the high wooded summit. When they rested at the top Ernest asked: "Why is it Beacon Top?"

At first nobody answered. Then Allan said: "Because once, years ago, when there were only Indians here, a noted brave came hunting delicate birds for his sick squaw. Just at this spot he was met by an enormous black bear. Not being civilized like Mr. Charles Dudley Warner, and not having like that gentleman a pail of blackberries to offer Mr. Bruin, his only resource was to climb a tree, that tall pine now dead, and swing his bicycle search-light by way of a signal of distress. His companions, seeing the

light soon came to his rescue, slew the bear and restored the hero to the bosom of his family."

"I hope he took some bear steak to his squaw," said Mr. Grafton.

"I wish I had some now," said Vivian.

"And I, and I," echoed the others.

"It's a good hour yet before luncheon," said Ruth. "Let us go back for a row; that will just fill in the time."

"I know a short cut from here," said Sidney, and following him down by another path, they soon reached an irregularly shaped meadow skirted by a grove of wonderful old beeches and young hemlocks. When they entered this grove the sound of falling water fell on the ear and they pressed eagerly forward.

"Wait, please wait!" cried Ruth. "Follow Sidney, for the first view of the falls should be from a certain point."

They obeyed at once and the view was sufficiently beautiful to repay them.

They stood on a small open place looking down a sheer precipice of one hundred and twenty feet. The foamy whiteness of the waterfall, some sixty feet high, was the first thing to claim their attention; but they soon began to take in other points.

"What jolly old rocks, what lovely ferns below the falls, and I say, Sid," said Allan, "why didn't you tell me about these boats?"

"Wanted to surprise you; besides Aunt Margaret never told me about the new boats until we came."

When they had climbed down and were in the boats, Allan, gazing up at the rocks, exclaimed: "I see it!"

"See what?" and other eyes were turned in the direction which he indicated.

"The deer's foot. It is in a horizontal position; that is what puzzled me. Just below that ragged crest is a large deer's foot in bas relief. Sid told me it was Deerfoot Falls, and he said I must find out the reason myself."

"There is a legend," said Ruth.

"A real one this time?" asked Tina.

"This might have been a real one, and Sidney can tell it best," said Ruth.

"There was a noble chief," began Sidney—

"Why don't you say once upon a time?" interrupted Allan.

"That wouldn't be dignified for an Indian tale." It was Ernest who spoke, and in an instant he was appalled at his temerity, but he could not endure without a protest having anything questioned which Sidney did.

"There was a noble chief," resumed Sidney, "called Deerfoot, who was betrothed to the most beautiful maiden of his tribe. She was as straight as that young pine and as graceful as the willow yonder. Her eyes were dark and

deep like the pool at our feet, and her hair was black—as black as—"

"Jet?" suggested Helen.

Sidney shook his head.

"Coal, ink, onyx—" still he paused.

"Make it purple darkness," said Ruth.

"That's it," said Sidney, "her hair was of purple darkness and altogether she was such a magnificent creature that when the chief had fallen in love with her it was impossible for him to love anybody else in the whole circle of all the tribes.

"Only one moon had waxed and waned since their betrothal when a messenger came from a hostile tribe and laid a bunch of poisoned arrows at the feet of Deerfoot.

"He was the most renowned warrior in the land so the maiden had little fear when he started on the war path; but the fates were not propitious and he was captured. All might still have been well if the hostile chief had not had a daughter. This daughter was a haughty beauty who would not listen to any of the braves of her own tribe, yet no sooner had she set eyes on Deerfoot than she decided he should be her husband. At her request his life was spared and she was amazed and indignant to find her magnificent offer declined. Deerfoot tried to escape, but although he was treated with the greatest kindness, to elude the vigilance of the

warriors who watched him was impossible. Every night he stood long looking up at the stars and listening if he might hear the sound of these waters far away. And every night the one he loved stood on these rocks where we are, and listened for his coming, for she knew he never would be false to her; if he were alive he would come.

"At last the love that the hostile maiden felt for Deerfoot turned to hate, and the rejected braves scorned him more and more. The word was given for his execution and they tortured him to death.

"The moon shone down brightly on this spot and the maiden came with a heavy heart to watch and listen. She gazed up where the deer's foot is now, but where then was only a plain rock. As she looked she saw this shape gradually forming on the plain surface, and she knew her own brave was there; that this was a message from him. She called, but he did not answer; hastily she climbed to the top of the falls; he was not there. Disappointed and in despair she threw herself from the dizzy height, and as she fell she heard the spirit of Deerfoot calling to her to have no fear, for death would reunite them in the happy hunting grounds, where there is no war."

Sidney had told his tale so well that for a minute they all gazed at the foamy spray. Then—

"I've made a discovery," exclaimed Vivian.

"Oh, no you haven't," said Ruth, laughing.

"I have; I see a box under that shelving rock."

"You see nothing," persisted Ruth; "if you do, it is a secret not to be divulged to-day."

Sidney had also spied the box, and guiding the boat as he wished with one oar, while Ernest rested on the other, he jumped to the shore.

"A pirate! a pirate!" shouted Allan. "Captain Kidd!"

"Oh, don't call him that," said Vivian, "I hate Captain Kidd."

"I'm not a pirate," said Sidney, "I'm a discoverer."

"We call him Sir Philip at school," said Ernest, "because Sir Philip Sidney is his favorite hero."

"Now that's lovely," said Vivian; "tell us, Sir Philip, what you have discovered."

"A mysterious chest, steel bound and weather beaten. It is padlocked and there is no key."

"Perhaps the hinges are loose," said Ralph, who had joined Sidney.

"Lift the lid from the back, Ralph—Ralph of the iron hand," said Allan.

"No," said Ralph, in the most matter of fact manner, for he was really in earnest; "it will not move."

"Come," called Ruth, "let us get home to luncheon before anyone else is nicknamed."

"What is that building over yonder through the woods?" asked Vivian as they walked homeward; "the one with the gray towers."

"That," answered Allan, "is a deserted house. They say that it is haunted. It is called Castle Silent."

"How long since?" asked Sidney, in a tone intended only for Allan's ear.

"Since the last instant. If I am to spend the summer here I must have romantic as well as picturesque surroundings."

CHAPTER IV.

CASTLE SILENT.

"Nelson's a rare one," said Allan, as he and Sidney, books in hand, walked toward the stables.

"What do you mean?"

"Why you know I've been cramming before you began, and down here outside the stables is a fine shady place for such a lazy dog as I am to lie off and read."

"The dogs keep you company I see."

"They have a fellow feeling for me, especially Jingo."

"He doesn't deserve his name; he's no fighter."

"He can fight if he chooses; but he prefers a dignified retirement."

"But what about Nelson? You began to say—"

"Oh, yes. One morning I heard him in the harness room talking to himself just as much in earnest as if he had a crony to hear. I tell you it was rich; he went over the present political situation until there wasn't a word left to say. The day before it was religion, perhaps this morning it will be philosophy; didn't you ever hear him?"

"I suppose I have but I never paid any attention; we're all so used to Nelson."

"You don't know what you've missed. Quiet, there he is now."

The two boys threw themselves down in a shady corner under the harness room window and with expectant faces waited to be edified by Nelson's wisdom.

"Now then," said the old man, "I'm goin' once more over this old sitooation."

"Political," whispered Allan.

"I've no fault to find with her yet."

"That I take it is his party, the G. O. P.," said Allan.

"She didn't do no more than was natural, and they were so fond o' one 'nother 'twas all right till that black hearted villain come between 'em with his lies. I aint very murderous but I've seen the time that I'd a been consigned to hell fire for the sake o' wringin' his neck."

Allan assumed a quizzical expression. "Work for a detective," he whispered.

"I thought fust 'twas jest a lover's quarrel between 'em; but it warn't. She was so peart, tossin' her head just like Miss Vivian does now, an' he was so high spirited—didn't stand to reason they shouldn't sometimes hev words. But I tell ye, sir," Nelson went on in his nasal monotone, "when ye hev powder around it's best to look out how ye tech a match to it. Queer I

should a ben on the spot time o' the quarrel. They didn't see me, an', bless your stars, 'twas all over before I could turn 'round. Talk about ghosts over there now! He looked like a ghost when he spoke them cruel words to her, and she was as white as one when she answered back. But them blue eyes flashed when she took off her ring and held it out to him. He shook, but she never flinched. He took the ring and flung it away. They didn't look where it landed; but turned and left, he goin' one way and she t'other. I've searched an' I've digged, nigh onto ten year, in the very spot where I see it fall. I never had no superstitions; but I've allus felt thet if I could find that ring it'd be made all right yet. I dreampt I found it last night and I see Mr. Raymond and Miss Margaret—"

Allan started up as if he had been shot. Sidney was already on his feet, and for an instant the two boys stared blankly at each other.

With flushed faces they walked rapidly away:

—"I feel like a criminal," said Allan; "but who could have thought it?"

"I might have thought," said Sidney, "but it didn't come to me till the last. When I was a very little chap and nobody thought I understood I heard them talking about the house over there—Castle Silent, you call it—and they said Aunt Margaret would have been married and lived there if something hadn't happened; but I

never connected it with this owner. I thought Aunt Margaret's lover died."

"What became of that villain, I'd like to know?" said Allan. "I'd like to wring his neck. Say, Sid, let's pursue him to the farthest pole, and pin him to an iceberg."

"I wish I had never heard of him," answered Sidney, ruefully.

"It was beastly to listen; but I've been down there for days and heard nothing but generalities."

"Oh, you couldn't have helped it."

"You act as if you could. But I've a bright idea. Let *us* find that ring!"

"As if we could after all these years; it must be nine or ten."

"Do you suppose the knights of the olden time paused at a trifle like that? Come, prove yourself worthy of your title, Sir Philip."

"Allan, I'm afraid you'll get yourself into mischief."

"Not I," answered Allan, "I have still my title to win; but I shall win it if you promise to follow where I lead."

Sidney looked into the now very earnest face and he said, "I promise." Then they went back to the house.

Such a chattering there was! Boys and girls all talking together trying to decide where they wished to drive after luncheon. Mr. Howe

was looking on with amusement but not helping them out of the difficulty.

"Oh, Sidney," called Vivian, "come and help us out. Ruth has told us about so many delightful drives we don't know which to choose. The only thing decided is that we are not to go past the haunted house."

"Haunted house!" exclaimed Allan, "why not? By all means let us go there; I love ghosts."

"Oh, dear," said Tina under her breath; but nobody except Ruth heard. Vivian, who a moment before was indifferent as to direction, now eagerly exclaimed: "Yes, by all means let us go."

Miss Howe, who had intended to drive, now found some excuse for staying at home, and Mr. Grafton regretted that he had repeated the village rumor about a ghost, for he saw what the others did not, that the choice of where they should go had influenced her decision.

Tina thought, "Dare I ask to stay with her?" —but the fear of being teased was worse than the ghost and she did not speak. Poor Tina when very small had been under the care of a timid and very superstitious nursemaid. She had been kept on good behavior by gruesome tales of ghosts and uncanny creatures and had acquired a habit of looking behind the curtains and doors at night, each time with a shiver that sent the cold chills down her spine. Nobody even

guessed until Grandmama Howe found it out, how really brave the little girl was, because her companions had no experience of their own to enlighten them.

The majority carried the day, and the drive being a short one, they were soon within sight of the object of their search.

"There it is."

"Where?"

"In that clump of trees."

"I see it."

"I don't. Now I do. Isn't it a jolly old place?"

"But it isn't finished. See that ivy-grown wall."

"It isn't ivy, Miriam, you'll have to put up with woodbine."

"I don't care; it's awful romantic."

"I'll tell you," said Helen, "it's like in 'What will he do with it?' You know the house didn't get finished."

"But where is County Guy?" quoted Ralph.

Allen and Sidney turned to him in amazement. "When on earth did you read Bulwer?" and, "I never would have suspected you of such frivolity," they said.

"Well," said Ralph, "I began that one book of Bulwer's and of course I wouldn't stop until I had finished it."

"Of course not, even if you had brought on

an earthquake as the result." This sounded ill-natured, but as a rule, no one suspected Allan of making ill-natured remarks and no one paid any attention to it except Ralph, with whom it rankled. Allan's father and mother were abroad and Ralph's mother had made him a member of her household for the school year. Ralph, who cared for few fellows, proceeded in his own mind to monopolize Allan's friendship and he had not yet learned that the more genial boy must, with his disposition, be friends with all pleasant people. Then, too, Allan's outspokenness had never been annoying before; but then they were alone; now it was different.

"Whose house is it? What is its story? There must be a romantic one!" exclaimed Vivian, while Sidney and Allan exchanged glances but said nothing.

Nobody answered. At last Mr. Grafton, who had driven to a point from which the house could be seen to the best advantage, said:—

"The house belongs, I believe, to a gentleman by the name of Raymond. I am told that there are all sorts of romantic stories about it; but I suspect that a new incident has been added by each narrator."

"Never mind, pile it up," said Vivian.

"Make it weird," and Allan put the whole effect of his late course of elocution into the word.

Tina crept close to Ruth, and under cover of a parasol held her hand. "Don't mind them," whispered that comforting maiden, so Tina smiled and tried to enjoy herself; but Vivian, who had seen the clasped hands, had laughed and that had made Tina miserable.

"The house is not as old as it looks," began Mr. Grafton. "It is neglect which gives it this appearance. My grandfather was a friend of the Mr. Raymond who built this house. He says that among the older members of the family were some great travelers who transmitted a roving disposition to their descendents. The father of the present Mr. Raymond never settled down in this place. It was left to the care of tenants until some years ago when the owner, after a short residence abroad, came to look after it. He cleared up the grounds, improved the walks and drives, built a new lodge and began that part of the house that looks like a ruin and is covered with woodbine." Mr. Grafton paused—

"But the romantic part?"

"And the ghost?"

"I am thinking which of the stories will please you best."

"The most romantic, of course."

"Some say there were spirits in the house and that was why he gave it up. Some say he was about to marry a lady who died on the day

set for the wedding. Others say he was betrothed to a foreign princess who could not get permission to marry him. When he found the matter was hopeless he turned artist, painted her miniature and, taking it with him, settled down in a little chalet from which he could watch the smoke rise every day from the chimneys of her father's palace. I suppose now she is dead and that is her spirit who, as a ghost, inhabits this place. That is, if there must be a ghost to satisfy you."

A short cross-road led through a denser wood than any they had yet seen. At first the house was lost, then they entered a large gateway at the back of the grounds and approaching the house drove around it. A tall gray stone structure with castellated turrets met their view. Stillness everywhere.

Only in the lodge were signs of life. Opposite it was a boy with a camera. He raised his cap in recognition while the boys simply stared at him. Then Allan and Sidney sprang from the wagon, caught him by the hands, clapped him on the shoulder and put so many questions that all the others could understand were his replies, given in a singularly clear and penetrating voice:

"No, I didn't know you were in the neighborhood."

"With my uncle. He's away now looking up a tutor."

"Yes, been living at the lodge."

"Must cram a little. You know I am behind in the solids because I would have my music."

"Oh," exclaimed Sidney, "come and join us! Grafton is just pining for more work."

In the meantime the girls were besieging Ralph.

"Who is he? Where does he come from?"

"He's our classmate, MacKim, Gerald MacKim," answered Ralph dryly. "He is always playing the violin and so he is behind in a lot of his studies."

Ralph was curt because he did not relish having Allan demonstrative over anyone else. He did not reciprocate in kind but he liked to monopolize his friendship.

When there was a pause MacKim stepped toward the carriage. "How are you, Wayne? Hello Ernest! Mr. Grafton too," shaking hands with that gentleman.

"Yes, he keeps us all in order," said Sidney; "and let me present you to the belles of the Beeches."

"All silver tongued, I have no doubt," with a bow worthy of Sidney and with an air which he seemed to have caught from his association with older men.

Having mentioned the girls by name, Sidney said: "Ruth, tell Aunt Margaret when you get home that I am walking back and will bring

our friend, Gerald MacKim, with me. I know that she can give him a hammock, and he never sleeps in anything else."

"Never, even on a polar expedition," solemnly answered Gerald. "But seriously, Sidney, I cannot do that, you know. I'll come over to-morrow but—"

"Nonsense, we want you to-day."

"Sorry, but to-day I'm too busy," said MacKim, stepping back to his instrument.

"Can't he tell us about the ghost?" asked Vivian. "He ought to know if he is living right here. Is there a ghost anyway?"

"In The Castle? Did you wish one to be there?"

"Yes, by all means."

"Then there is. The most interesting ghost you ever saw."

The horses were growing restive and Mr. Grafton allowed them to go on. Gerald renewed his promise to see them the next day and in a few minutes the party were again at The Beeches.

"Are you satisfied? What did you see?" Miss Howe put the questions as she met them, looking paler than usual, on the piazza.

"A charming young gentleman," answered Ruth.

"And pray, Miss Sherwood," Sidney assumed an aggrieved air, "why must MacKim be designated as a gentleman when the rest of us are simply boys?"

"My classmate, MacKim, Aunt Margaret," explained Sidney. "He is staying at the lodge over there. Ruth is right in calling him a gentleman; we boys might all learn good manners from him."

"He is the best fellow in the world," said Allan.

"Very well," said Miss Howe, "we'll welcome him to The Beeches;" and all except Tina and Ralph expressed their delight at this promised addition to their party. Ralph was unreasonably vexed with Allan and Tina had not yet sufficiently recovered herself to care about anything or anybody new. But nobody could stay vexed with Allan, and that evening Ralph said: "Why didn't you tell me this morning that you were going to grind; I would have gone with you."

"But you haven't anything to make up; you touch high water mark in everything."

"Maybe I could have helped you."

"What, and deprive old Grafton of his object in life; but it's awfully good of you just the same," he hastened to add, for he saw that Ralph did not quite like what he had said.

It was a lovely moonlight night and after sitting on the piazza awhile, they had strolled down by twos and threes into the grounds, some of them going as far as the road. Ralph, to whom moonlight and daylight were pretty much alike—the hidden poetry of his soul being yet in slumber—was trying to interest Allan in the

relative merits of Yale and Harvard, his decision as to a college not being yet made, while Allan, with a bright thought born of the moonlight, was hunting for an excuse to leave Ralph without hurting his feelings. All at once Mr. Grafton called out: "Oh, Ralph, help me won't you? Mr. Howe wishes to know—"

As Ralph turned away, Allan hastened after Sidney. "Come quick," he said, taking his arm.

"What is it?" asked Sidney.

"My lady's champion hies away on midnight quest," was the answer.

"What on earth do you mean?"

"I mean that I saw Nelson fixing up a dark lantern to-day and I've just seen the romantic old fellow stealing along there by the edge of the road."

"Well, what of it?"

"Oh, Sir Philip, Sir Philip, how dull you are. He has made up his mind to find that ring, and if we follow we can find out where it was lost. I have not had a dream about it; but I have a conviction that I shall find the jewel."

Allan was right. Nelson took the straightest course to Castle Silent, and avoiding the entrance, went to the unfinished part and with the aid of his lantern explored one side of the building. He stooped and picked up something from the ground, gave a low whistle of satisfaction and started homeward.

"His spectacles," laughed Allan; "whatever would Nelson have done if he had lost them."

"I am glad we followed," said Sidney. "He has been looking here during the day for that ring and depend upon it, where those glasses lay is the spot! Now it only requires digging and determination."

"What will they think of us?" asked Allan. "It must be getting late,and your Aunt Margaret asked us to come into the house for games."

"Isn't there a short cut back?"

"There must be; we'll risk it."

Across the first field or two it was plain sailing, then,—"Ugh," exclaimed Allan, "barbed wire!"

Then came a strange voice—two strange voices:—

"So we've caught you at last. Mighty good fun ain't it, fur you college chaps to steal chickens? We'll show ye 't ain't so funny as ye think."

"But we are not college chaps," asserted Allan.

"Humph!" growled the elder of their captors, "ye cyant fool me, ye fooled the constable t'other night, but ye cyant fool me. Come along."

CHAPTER V.

THE FISHING EXPEDITION.

Great was the wonderment when, after an hour had passed, Sidney and Allan did not appear.

"Perhaps they did not know we expected them to play games," said Miss Howe; "but here they come now."

"Where have you been?" "Why, are you hurt?" and, "Tell us all about it, quick!" were some of the exclamations which greeted them.

"Where is Uncle Earle?" asked Sidney.

"In his study," was the answer, and Sidney disappeared, leaving Allan to give whatever whimsical explanation might occur to him.

"You see," said Allan, "we knew there were games afoot, and not being very proficient, we went out to play the game of bramble-bush by way of practice. Sidney didn't accomplish much but I have taken a diploma. Please let me have a hand at bezique."

"Then you won't tell us?"

"I have told, haven't I?" said Allan, and re-adjusting the handkerchief on his left hand so that he could manage his cards, he settled down to the game.

"Uncle Earle!"

"Yes, Sidney."

"I'm sorry to interrupt you; but the fact is Allan and I were mistaken for chicken thieves just now and we could not get back as early as we intended."

"You were not playing any practical jokes on the farmers, were you?"

"Not at all."

"I am glad; it has always seemed to me that life could be made spicy without that particular kind of diversion."

"But it seems that somebody else had been playing jokes. Fortunately for us the real offenders were captured soon after we were."

"And there is nothing else to tell?"

Sidney hesitated an instant, then looking his uncle full in the face he said: "No, there is nothing else to tell."

"And much not to tell," said Mr. Howe, laughing. "Very well, I am always sure of one thing and that is that I can trust you to be gentlemen. By the way, have you boys any plans for tomorrow? I find that I have to be away the greater part of the day."

"Nothing special, but Gerald MacKim is coming over in the morning."

"MacKim! Is he at the lodge?"

"Yes, with his uncle, Mr. Raymond."

Mr. Howe paused as if thinking intently, and

after a moment's hesitation asked: "Is MacKim to remain all summer?"

"Yes, he is to have a tutor at the lodge. Mr. Raymond goes abroad again next week. I wish Gerald could study with us under Grafton."

"Very well, if Mr. Grafton is willing I have no objection," and as Sidney thanked him and left the study, Mr. Howe with a grave face turned again to his desk.

They were all on the piazza when Gerald MacKim presented himself the next morning to see the boys and to pay his respects to Mrs. and Miss Howe. Sidney, who stood by his aunt, saw her flush and step back so that she might not meet him at once; but, as he was presented to her mother, she came forward with the sweet graciousness of her usual manner. Mr. Howe's keen searching look changed to one of cordial approval as Gerald spoke to one after another and, with an easy grace, fell in at once with the spirit of the party.

"Have you any plan for to-day?" asked Gerald.

"Nothing in particular, why?" answered Sidney.

"I could show you fellows some good fishing if you are up to it."

"Indeed we are."

"What's the reason girls can't fish!"

Gerald looked up at Vivian Russell but said

nothing; it had not occurred to him that the idea would enter the head of any of the girls.

"I am sure we could; why couldn't we?" she persisted.

Gerald did not answer; with a comical shrug, expressing that the question was too much for him, he waved his hand toward the other boys clustered in a group near him, referring it to them collectively.

"Why you'd get wet," stammered Ernest, who always braced up to the occasion when anything was expected of him.

"You'd scare all the fish," said Ralph.

With all his good nature Sidney could not help being annoyed at Ralph's contemptuous tone, and he was on the point of making a reply for which he would have been sorry, when Allan broke in with:—

"You know in trout fishing you have to wade up the brooks and you slip and fall and your gown gets wet and you have no end of a horrid time."

Miss Howe was smiling; it was so evident that the boys would like to go off by themselves for a good time, the prospect of it growing more attractive as the idea developed in their minds.

"I should think it would be horrid." Of all the girls Helen was the only one not thoroughly imbued with the spirit of the outdoor life. All the new gowns, a little longer than usual, to make

her seem a young lady, about which she had written to Ruth, had great fascination and she liked to put them on and sit on the piazza as they were doing now. Up to this time there had been little opportunity for this sort of thing. Hasty toilets for supper after long walks or drives had been the rule. Evenings were short for they had been tired enough with their active exertions to go early to bed.

"But I'd like to know, Ruth Sherwood, what you meant by having us bring such a costume as you did if we are not to go fishing."

"I didn't mean that, Vivian dear, there are some ravines to go through when we need to dress in that way. But I think we might go fishing," this with a teasing look at the boys, who were growing anxious as to the result of the argument.

"This is too important a question to be settled this morning." It was Mr. Howe speaking in a tone which betokened a quick decision of the matter: "If you wish to go fishing to-day"—turning to the boys—"you must go by yourselves and let Nelson drive you. Later in the season, tramp if you please, but I do not think you are quite up to it yet."

"May we start pretty soon?" asked Gerald; "every minute counts now."

"As soon as we can get our fishing tackle ready," said Sidney, starting toward the door.

"And get into some old clothes," said Gerald.

"Why you're not in yours, or you must be a terrific swell when you are in your good ones."

"I came to pay my respects to the ladies and didn't wish to be taken for a barbarian. We must go back to the cottage anyway for my rod."

Sidney had his pet rod, so had Allan. The others with the exception of Ralph, did not know about the fishing. He was far too prudent to squander his spending money on such things; but, fortunately for everybody's enjoyment, Mr. Howe had sent up from New York an ample supply which had been stored in the carriage house to which Sidney led the boys after they had donned their pirate costumes.

"What a lot of fixings!" exclaimed Allan.

"Lucky the girls didn't carry their point," said Ralph, "they would have spoiled some of the best rods the first time." As he spoke he proceeded to help himself to the best the stock afforded in view of any such catastrophy in the future as he had imagined.

"What flies shall you take, Sidney?"

"Everything gorgeous. The Royal Coachman, Queen of the Water, and—"

"It's a better 'Shoemaker' day," said Gerald dryly.

"I'll bet you it isn't. I'll stake my fortune on these splendid fellows."

"I don't know what you call this," said Allan,

"but he's medium and I'll pin my faith to him."

Ernest stood an interested spectator, not touching rod or reel or fly. It was still too much of a fairy tale for him to realize his part in it.

"Hurry up, laggard. Make your choice or you'll be late."

"Oh Sidney, I can't."

"Nonsense, I'll choose for you. There, put your creel on so, fasten these flies in your hat and—I say, fellows, here's a pretty go, nobody's got any hobnailed shoes. What'll we do?"

"Does this box belong to the outfit?"

"Yes, maybe they're in there. Hammer and chisel, quick!"

Out they came, hobnailed shoes to supply the party. Some a little large, but they were voted all right.

"What a perfect Fairy Godmother this uncle of yours is," said MacKim.

"He's just the splendidest fellow in the world," was Sidney's reply, as he took a swift survey to see that all were supplied.

"Forward, march!" It was Gerald's voice, but he gave Sidney a little push toward the head of the column, retreating himself to the rear.

"Oh how picturesque!" exclaimed Ruth as they filed up to the piazza.

"Wait, do wait till I get my sketch book. I haven't had such an opportunity for an age."

"Couldn't think of it, Miss Russell. You'd exhibit us in the next Academy and ruin our pretentions to beauty forever."

"Sir Philip, for an elegant gentleman, you are the rudest person I have met."

"I am only a pirate now, Miss Vivian. Don't confound me with my proper character, please."

The bays stood patiently before the big wagon until the last bit of luggage was stowed.

"I should think such a hubbub would start your fiery steeds," said Allan, who had taken his place by Nelson.

"Horses is just like boys," was the reply. "Train 'em to mind and they'll mind. Let 'em take the bit in their own mouths and there's no tellin' where they'll fetch up."

The scramble for seats was over; all were in the wagon except Gerald who had turned toward the piazza.

"Pon my honor if Lord Chesterfield isn't going to say good-bye in due form. I vow I'll not be outdone in politeness," and Sidney sprang from the wagon.

MacKim doffed his cap, offered his hand to Mrs. and Miss Howe and promised to take good care of the party.

Sidney made his most elaborate bow and promised to take care of Gerald.

"Come along," said Allan to Ernest, half pulling him out of the wagon.

"Oh dear, she mightn't like it," said the boy; but dutifully followed, made an awkward bow and hurried down the steps while Allan laughing merrily made his adieux. Ralph felt it was great nonsense, a most unnecessary delay. However, he managed to put a pretty good face on it by keeping up with his cousin and bowing stiffly as he passed the ladies.

The girls enjoyed it, as they would anything which delayed the departure; but with all the delays the boys were off at last.

"We're going to be gone all day?"

"Yes."

"And nobody has had the forethought to provide luncheon." Ralph was troubled.

"Plenty o' folks has hindsight but not so many on them has foresight." Nelson laughed to himself under his big straw hat.

"What are we going to eat, Sidney? Do you know?"

"Fish."

"Suppose we don't catch any?"

"So much the worse."

Gerald was not long in transforming himself into a pirate. Then, with a laugh at Ralph's expense, he asked him to help carry a basket from the lodge. The corner of a brown loaf peeped from a napkin; some eggs were visible below.

"Oh!" said Ralph, the only comment made as they lifted it into the wagon.—

There was something solemn about the grand woods which they entered after leaving the open, comparatively uninteresting road. School talk, reminiscences of old escapades, interchange of news from vacation letters, were for the moment forgotten.

"I've been here before." Nelson's tone was explanatory.

"How still it is."

"How big the trees are."

"It's the kind 'o place, boys, that makes ye think of your backslidin's and short comin's. I'm allers glad to get on t'other side of it."

The branches for the most part met overhead. A single bird note fell on the ear. That was the only sound, except the tramp of the horses' hoofs and the turning of the wheels. Rich ferns grew by the wayside, here and there a rock lay seemingly misplaced among the green.

"Here we are again," said Gerald. "What was I saying? Oh I know, that everybody has some superstition."

"I haven't," said Ralph indignantly.

"I'll bet you have."

The talk was cut short by Nelson stopping the horses at a word from Gerald.

"What are we stopping here for? There isn't any water near here."

"We are almost to it, we walk in from here. Nelson, do you know the short cut to the foot of the hill where the stream comes out?"

"I reckon there aint airy road about here but what I knowed afore you youngsters was born."

"All right, meet us there, will you? And, I say, if any of you fellows have valuable watches and things you'd better leave them with Nelson if you want them to keep dry."

"I left my watch home," said Ralph, "but I shouldn't like this little pocket-book to get wet."

"It isn't much of a one to look at," said Sidney.

"No, but it was my grandfather's. He carried it a long time and was always lucky; my father had it too, and was called fortunate. I have an idea that I shall be lucky too, so long as I carry it."

> "A mad little man was my friend Ralph,
> And a mad little man was he,
> No superstitious whim he'd own,
> He swore indignantly,"

sang Allan.

"Pretty impromptu for a class poet."

"It's a quotation from your prize lyric, Sid."

"If you'll take two of the fellows in through here, Sidney," said Gerald, "straight through this opening, I'll strike it a bit lower down with the others and we'll all have some chance. We have the best pool but you have more stream. Fish down till you see us."

"If I was you'uns," Nelson put one foot on the

wagon box, and rested an elbow on his knee with his chin in his hand, "I'd take a snack afore I I struck in."

"Capital idea. But don't waste time, boys. There's the basket, be careful of the salt in case we get some fish and want to cook them."

"Talkin' about horses reminds me," said Nelson—nobody had spoken of horses but Nelson had this on his mind—"them thoroughbreds is due to-morrer."

"What, all the horses? Are they coming to-morrow?"

"Whoop-la!" and up went the caps into the air.

"Yaas, and if I could get some real stiddy youngsters to help bring 'em down I might take 'em with me; but I reckon the farmer's boys'll get the job."

"Now Nelson," said Sidney, "you know we are real stiddy and just the help you want."

"Wal, I suppose you might as well begin, for as I understand the thing, Mr. Howe is sendin' up these hosses so that you can all ride and break your necks, gals included, and I s'pose the sooner it's over the better."

"All right, we'll be on hand. What time in the morning shall we be ready?"

"In the morning? Oh I sha'n't start very early. I did calkerlate to start about three, but I reckon four will do."

"Three o'clock in the morning!" exclaimed Allan.

"Oh, Nelson doesn't think anything of that," said Sidney.

"No, nor I," added Gerald. "I've been off many a time early in the morning to fish, and I wish it were earlier now. Let us go; there isn't a minute to lose."

CHAPTER VI.

CROWNING THE KNIGHTS.

"Why not go to our picnic ground at Deerfoot to-day?" asked Mrs. Howe, when the last fish line had trailed out of sight.

"Oh, yes, let us go!" and the girls ran away to get ready, leaving Mrs. Howe and her daughter talking together.

"I am much pleased with Gerald, Margaret." There was an interrogative tone in Mrs. Howe's voice.

"Yes," answered Margaret, turning to the window, "he is very attractive."

"It will be lonely for him at the lodge,—" the older lady watched the effect of her words, but Margaret did not reply.

"I suppose that Sidney would like to invite him here," continued Mrs. Howe.

"If you would like it mother"—Miss Howe turned toward her— "there is no reason why he should not come."

"To think," said Ruth, when girls, rugs, books, fancy work and parasols were all deposited on the rocks, "to think all these days have passed and my chest has never been opened."

"The real reason," said Vivian, "why I have not come down here by myself and broken it open is because I believed it to be Pandora's box. I was afraid that if I let out all the buzzing things our summer might be spoiled."

"Such virtuous forbearance must be rewarded," said Ruth, tossing her a brass key, "you shall open the treasure box."

"Oh, Helen, Miriam, look!" exclaimed Vivian, "a beautiful picnic outfit! Dishes, glasses, spoons, Japanese napkins, everything."

"That flat rock is the table," said Ruth.

"And this one the sideboard," asked Helen, "with a little shelf above? May we set them now, or is it too early?"

"As you please; but Aunt Margaret is going to read to us before luncheon."

"First we must gather sticks for the fire," said Miss Howe, to which they all agreed.

Time never hung heavy at the Howe picnics and this one was no exception to the rule. Luncheon seemed to come early, and when they had finished Mrs. Howe said:

"I have a proposition to make which I am not at all sure will meet with your favor."

"Oh, yes! Anything that you say."

"I am not sure about this. In some ways I am pretty old fashioned and I think that every girl should know how to make good bread and good coffee. Mr. Howe proposes that you shall all learn

to do so while you are here and that each one of you young ladies shall be able before you go to select judiciously the materials for, and direct the preparation of a complete dinner."

"The young lady from Philadelphia desires the definition of a complete dinner," said Miss Howe.

"Will the inquiring young lady give her own idea?"

"As I am expected to cook it," said Vivian, "I will take the complete dinner of the Irish peasant, potatoes and salt."

"Think of offering that when cooked, to Mr. Howe," said Miriam.

"What is your definition, then?"

"I should go to the cook books," answered Miriam.—"I know there is one with dinners for every day in the year—I should choose one out of that and then learn to cook it."

"What would you do, Tina?"

"Why, I should think up some time when I was desperately hungry, what I most wanted to eat; I should think that would be it."

"I fear that would be out of proportion," said Miss Howe. "Hunger is the best sauce and you would be apt to have more sauce than dinner."

"But I like sauce best," replied Tina; "what does Ruth say?"

"Soup and dessert," promptly replied that maiden.

"I should think," Helen spoke in an excited tone, "that a complete dinner would be the kind that we have here every day. I heard Mr. Howe say that it was his idea of real comfort. I wish I could cook such a one."

"Hurrah for you, Helen!" said Vivian; "I always knew you had a soul above gowns if you would only give it a chance to flutter."

Helen blushed but added:—"Do you really think we could learn to cook such dinners as you have, Miss Howe?"

Miss Howe looked grave and did not reply at once.

"I am sure you can, dear;" it was Mrs. Howe's encouraging voice. She had watched all of the girls with keen interest and she was greatly pleased by this unexpected question from the one apparently the least practical.

"Miss Howe?"

"Yes, Vivian."

"You do not believe very much in our ability to cook, do you? You do not look enthusiastic."

"To tell the truth, girls," said Miss Howe, "I must admit I am not enthusiastic about it. I try to be equal to all my brother's surprises; but this time the undertaking seems too great. However, we will rise to the occasion. I am glad the beginning is to be bread and coffee, with an ideal scheme for the rest, and I have no doubt I shall be surprised by the result."

"Will you let them try more if they wish to; or would such an unusual proceeding cause a kitchen stampede?"

"There might be a sudden desire to visit home relatives; but Martha and her daughter are always ready in an emergency, you know."

"Then I am to understand that I can indulge as many vagaries as I please."

"How are we to begin?" asked Ruth, "are the boys to have anything to do with it?"

"Boys in the kitchen!" exclaimed Vivian.

"Boys baking bread!" said Miriam. "I have heard of their making coffee at a picnic; but bread! Why, the idea!"

"No," said Mrs. Howe, "I think we do not want the boys. My plan would be that you should altogether take an object lesson first in coffee and then in bread-making, after which one of you might try by herself and then the others in turn."

"I should like to take charge of this undertaking, myself," added Mrs. Howe.

"It will tire you quite too much, mother."

"Not if I can choose my time, and we need not keep it up long enough for anyone to get tired."

A little later when they were walking home, Vivian asked Ruth, "How old is your sweet grandmama?"

"Seventy-two."

"Seventy-two! Wait a minute, let me try to

realize it. Seventy—why seventy isn't simply old, it's aged,and yet Mrs. Howe is just as young in some ways as we are."

"Younger in some, Uncle Earle says."

"That's the way I'm going to be,"said Vivian; "the older I grow the younger I am going to get," and she went in to consult Mrs. Howe at once about the bread-making while they waited for the boys to return.

"I should think they would come by this time,"said Ruth,as the twilight began to deepen.

"Hark!"

Miss Howe stepped out on the piazza, eagerly followed by the girls. A sound of voices in the distance warranted the announcement: "They are coming."

"How slow they are!" Vivian was growing impatient.

"Nelson always drives slowly when he comes home from fishing," answered Ruth.

"Yes," said her Aunt Margaret, "he likes to prolong the pleasure of a good time."

"I declare they are singing, 'Three Blind Mice'."

"No, Tina, it is something about fish—listen."

"Three prime trout,
Caught in a pool,
They all ran after the same fell hook
Caught by the flies from the fiddler's book.
Three prime trout."

The round grew a little mixed as they came

up in front of the piazza; but the voices were very merry. A hasty unloading followed. "Three cheers and a tiger for Gerald!" shouted Sidney. They were given with a will and the hero of the hour, holding in his open creel the three largest trout that had been caught, walked up to Miss Howe and presented them to her, while a medley of voices followed.

"Did you really catch all the big ones?"

"Sidney, let's see yours."

"Allan, how many have you got?"

"Why, Ernest, that's very good for the first time."

Ralph stood a little in the background, a slight wonderment on his face. Nobody asked about his until Miss Howe said: "Ralph, you are so quiet you are going to surprise us, I am sure."

Then it seemed perfectly natural to him that he had not joined in with the others, for here was a good reason, and he displayed his trophies. "Not so large as Gerald's, you see, Aunt Margaret, but more of them." He spoke slowly for there was a little feeling towards Allan who might, he thought—since he had no display of his own to make—have put his friend forward as one of the most successful fishermen of the day.

"Would you like them for supper, or to-morrow morning?"

"Oh, Aunt Margaret!" Sidney threw such

despair into his tone that Miss Howe immediately answered:

"Very well, it only means a difference between supper as soon as the fish can be gotten ready and supper as soon as you can get ready."

"We are hungry as bears; but we will wait if the others will."

"Of course we will," a chorus from the girls.

"I say, Miss Howe, where'd I better put this flower truck? Them youngsters is all fur fish now; but nothin' would do but we must bring home half of the woods besides."

"Oh, Miss Howe," it was Ernest's voice, "let me help; it's the loveliest laurel flowers, ever so much handsomer than those we found the other day. Allan said we would make up a box of them for the Flower Mission and Sidney said we could pick a lot of daisies to-morrow to put with them."

Ruth and Miriam hastened to the wagon; the others were more interested in the fish.

"How strange," said Miriam.

"What is strange?"

"Why to think that the boys should have brought flowers all the way from the woods for the Flower Mission, and they don't make any fuss about it either."

"That's what I like about boys," said Ruth, "real boys, I mean, like Sidney and the rest of them; when they want to do a nice thing they

just up and do it. Now we girls talk about a good act and fuss over it and act half the time as if we were ashamed of it."

Miriam turned her face away for she felt that Ruth could see her flush even in the darkening light; it was so exactly what she had often done and felt.

"Why shouldn't we enjoy them to-night?" asked Miss Howe. "Take them in, as they are in great branches, the big jars will hold them and they will get a good drink before morning."

"A bower of bloom," said Sidney, when they went into the dining-room for supper, "I had no idea we gathered so much. I thought we lost almost no time from fishing."

"Tell me, Vivian," he asked a few minutes afterward, "did you ever in your life taste such a delicious morsel as you have just eaten?"

"Yes."

"Where?" indignantly.

"Yes, where?" Allan and Gerald together.

"The little fish I ate before this, and the one before that was even more delicious. Sidney," with a teasing air, "you should never, never take more than one mouthful of trout. It is so bewilderingly enchanting, that you should remember it forever."

"Oh!" sighed Allan, dropping his fork with a mock gesture of despair; "to think how soon it will be over."

"Courage," said Vivian, "there are other dainties to come another day."

"What do you think grandmama proposed to us to-day?" asked Ruth.

"Something fine, of course."

"She says that all of us girls are to learn to make coffee and bake bread and that you boys are to be unprejudiced judges of who makes the best."

"Oh now, see here, you're joking, you know you are. Isn't she, Aunt Margaret?" said Sidney.

Miss Howe slowly shook her head; but she was thinking that this rather novel scheme could scarcely be accomplished.

"I don't see," Ralph broke the sudden silence, "why girls shouldn't learn to cook now, just as well as they used to."

"How well did they used to cook?"

"Well I mean, cook now as a matter of course."

"They haven't any time as I see," said Sidney.

"But they used to have time, what do they do with it now," persisted Ralph.

"They don't go fishing for one thing," said Sidney.

"No," answered Ralph, not smiling with the rest, "they don't weave nor spin nor cook nor—. What do they do, Miss Howe?"

"They spend more years in school for one thing."

"And give more time to study afterward," said Miriam.

"Doesn't dress take more time now?" asked Helen.

"I suppose so."

"I've heard my grandmama say," said Tina, "that in these days people just visit when they go out, but when she was young they did some work while they talked."

"Then, besides, the gentlemen did a great deal of reading aloud," said Mrs. Howe.

"A good idea," said Ruth. "We'll make the boys do it."

"Thank you kindly." Sidney bowed. "We shall emerge from our crudeness, I have no doubt, into perfect gentlemen of the old school. What's the matter, Al?" for Allan had made a sudden dive with his hand under the table.

"Nothing, only I thought I felt a buckle sprouting on my shoe, and I can feel lace ruffles at my wrist."

Ralph did not feel that the matter had been satisfactorily settled and insisted on continuing the subject. At last Miss Howe said: "Ask your uncle what he thinks about it."

"Why don't girls have more time?" said Mr. Howe. "Dear me how should I know? But since you ask me, I will try to answer."

"Nobody has so much time. In the first place the world has grown smaller. Rapid means of communication have opened up to us regions that were only speculated about before. We

travel more, and those who do not travel keep up active correspondence with those who do. Houses are more elaborate, requiring more complicated service, and more from the executive at the head of affairs. Dress takes more time, social duties as at present managed are more exacting. Avenues of knowledge are opened in every direction, not only through home study, but by societies of all kinds, parlor lectures, natural history, excursions, musicals. Ease and affluence bring leisure to parents to train their children's minds. Young girls have so many things before them the difficulty is what to choose.

"There! I have given you almost a column for an encyclopedia,and I suppose it is all right; but now let me give you the true reason why girls do not have time. Evenings do not count; morning is the time to accomplish wonders and, as a rule, we sit up so late that we have no mornings to speak of."

"That's so," said Ralph. "Uncle Earle is right."

"That is only because you like to get up and grub early in the morning," said Allan.

"No it isn't, the afternoon is good for nothing."

"It's the time when I feel most up to things," said Ernest.

"Give me the midnight oil," said Sidney.

"Sometimes," continued Mr. Howe thoughtfully, "I think that girls and older women have

less time because there is a lack of chivalry among the men. I know some men and some boys who are much too selfishly exacting to realize how much of other people's time they consume. Where now are the knights worthy to be crowned by a peerless woman's hand?''

Ralph opened his lips to answer; but thinking better of it, kept silence. Vivian, with a swift movement, reached one of the jars and, stripping some laurel leaves from a branch, began weaving them into a wreath, while Ruth, guessing her meaning, began to weave another.

''What is the chief characteristic of a knight, Mr. Howe?'' asked Vivian.

''Gentleness,'' was the prompt answer. ''A true knight cares for the weak and remembers the suffering.''

With a graceful movement Vivian turned to where Sidney and Allan were sitting and placed a wreath on either head. Then, with a tragic air which suited her well she said,—''Where are the knights? Behold those who, in gathering fair flowers, care for the weak and remember the suffering; Sir Philip and—and—the other knight.''

''Good for you, Vivian Russell,'' said Tina.

''Rather hard on the rest of us,'' added Gerald.

Sidney rose with a manner in keeping with Vivian's. ''Crowned by a peerless woman's hand,'' he said, as he bowed low before her.

CHAPTER VII.

DON FULANO.

Each morning's breakfast was now invested with especial interest and there were plenty of criticisms ready for Tina's coffee.

"Magnifica!" exclaimed Allen as he tasted his.

"Oh, my!" said Ernest as he followed suit.

"Miss Wright," said Sidney, "if I have ever done anything to displease you or disturb your feelings, I beg your humblest pardon. I'll get down on my knees if you say so, for this coffee is just—well it just is—that's all!"

Tina's plain face was a good sight to see. She was fairly transformed by pleasure.

"Why is it," asked Ralph, "that some girls can do things all right and some girls can't do the same thing even in the same way?"

"Give it up," said Allen, "but I don't believe anybody will beat Helen's bread. I wish you girls would tell me how long it takes you to make bread, and what is the mysterious 'set?' "

"To set bread, means to mix what is called the sponge," answered Helen, "and stand the bowl with it in where it will keep warm with-

out being too hot, so that it can rise in the proper time and be ready to mould into loaves for baking."

"What is the proper time?"

"All night, of course."

"Why must it be all night? Why could you not set it in the morning and bake it in the evening?"

"Nobody ever heard of such a thing," said Miriam; "bread must be set over night."

"So wise after one day's study of the cook book," said Allan; "what will our knowledge be by comparison at the end of a week?"

"Allan," said Ralph, "I wish you wouldn't be so tiresome. You say I never know when to drop a subject, but you're worse. I can't see what in the world you want to bother the girls about their bread for."

"Purely altruistic motives, my dear fellow. If the girls fail I mean to bake some bread myself, only I am sure I should not set mine over night."

"Humph!" was all Ralph vouchsafed in reply.

Tina, who had gone away to look at her bread, now came back appearing not a little important.

"A pearl of flour was on her cheek,
And in her hair a yeast globule,"—began Allan,

but Sidney interrupted with,—

"Shall I go for the doctor now, Aunt Margaret, or will a little later do?"

"What do you mean, Sidney?"

"Why, if Helen and Tina have kneaded their bread as much as the cook book says I should think that one or both of them would have sprained wrists to be bound up."

"No, indeed!" exclaimed Tina indignantly, "our wrists are all right."

"And her hand is still capable of boxing a saucy boy's ears," said Allan.

"Oh, I didn't mean"—and Tina was quite overcome with confusion.

"My dear child," said Ruth, "are you never going to get used to Allan's speeches?"

"I don't know," answered Tina, "I'll try."

"And now, Uncle Earle, can't we go and see the horses?" asked Ruth; "The boys say they are splendid."

"Why, have they come?" said Helen.

"There, we were just waiting to see if all you girls would find out; Ruth saw us come early with them."

Not much time was lost in getting to the stables and Gerald joined them as they reached the doors. Stable boys, under the direction of a head groom, were adding finishing touches to equine toilets, while Nelson's face—as he stood giving a general superintendence to the whole—was a study to see.

"What a superb black," exclaimed Vivian, "how I should like to ride him! But I suppose

he is too gorgeous for anybody but the biggest boys."

"That's a lovely gray," said Ruth. "I choose that one for mine."

"I like the sorrel best," said Sidney.

"Suppose you all choose," advised Mr. Howe, "that is, choose any but the black; Nelson tells me he seems a little tricky."

"I reckon I'd better lead him out to water," said Nelson, "then you can see how he behaves."

"Isn't it too bad," asked Vivian, "that such a superb creature should be vicious? I have taken a vow this moment to ride him or die in the attempt."

"Remember, my dear," Miss Howe spoke gently, "that a mistaken vow is much better broken than kept."

"I know; but there he comes. Isn't he magnificent?"

"Don't come too near, Miss Howe," called Nelson.

"We're not going to; but he seems quiet."

"Yaas, but there's no tellin'. I've been a studyin' of him and I should say he's been somebody's pet, and then been abused arterwards. He's suspicious an' he thinks he's got to defend himself."

"Won't you conquer him after awhile?"

"I reckon so. I've been a readin' thet air

book, 'Black Beauty', an' I thought the youngsters made too much of a time over it; but I tell you every once in a while the man that wrote that book says suthin'."

"It wasn't a man,Nelson," said Ruth, "it was a woman."

"Pshaw!" exclaimed Nelson.

All this time the new Black Beauty stood keenly alert, sensitive to every tone. All eyes were fastened on him and no one noticed Gerald until he had thrown his coat over the limb of a tree and put some lumps of sugar which he had brought from the house into his trousers' pocket. Then, "Don't speak for a minute please,Nelson," he said, as he walked up firmly and faced the horse.

A sudden putting forth of the delicate ears, a slight dilation of the nostril, an almost imperceptible quiver of the hoofs made some of the party tremble and hold their breath. Gerald looked steadily into the startled eyes, until the frightened look went out of them.

"What are you afraid of, Beauty?" he said, his full rich voice lingering on the words. Then —in a commonplace tone—"Drop the halter please, Nelson," and Nelson, greatly interested in the result, silently complied.

Gerald did not touch the halter. "Come and get a drink," he said, pointing to the watering trough in front of them. With his eyes fixed

on the big black ones he took a step forward and the horse followed. Gerald led the way to the cool water and soon the proud head was thrust into it almost up to the eyes. A long draught and then a shake and a snort, followed by another plunge and a repetition of the deep drinking.

"I tell ye," said Nelson, "that air is a good hoss an' a good natured hoss. I never see one drink like that, but I'd back him ag'in any hoss agoin'."

Gerald smiled as he listened. He took a lump of sugar out of his pocket and offered it on open palm to his new friend.

"Suppose he bites," suggested Miriam.

"He won't," answered Vivian.

Nor did he. Daintily he took the sugar and when he had eaten it nosed about the pocket for another lump.

"Didn't I tell ye?" said Nelson, "I knowed he was somebody's pet."

Gerald took out another lump of sugar which was taken as before. The third one he played with a moment, then gave it and emptied his pocket to show there was no more. After this he gathered up the halter, vaulted lightly on the horse's back, and, rightly judging that he had to do with a thoroughly trained saddle horse, guided him up to the stables and led him into his stall.

There was no sound, not a word till Gerald reappeared. Then a shout and a hurrah. "Oh!" said Vivian, "how I wish I could have done that!"

"What made you think you could conquer him, Gerald?" asked Mr. Howe.

"I can always make some of the birds and animals in the woods come to me, and I've watched horse tamers and talked with them. I have always wanted to try what I could do with a horse that was called vicious."

"I think," said Mr. Howe, "that you have won the right to ride the black if you care to."

"I should like it above all things," answered Gerald.

"But don't call him Black Beauty," said Ruth. "What ought he to be called, Aunt Margaret?"

"I have only one name for such a horse as that," she answered.

"And that is—?"

"Don Fulano, the black horse which Winthrop gave to John Brent."

"Fulano he is by acclamation," said Sidney, when they had all expressed approval, and later it was found that he answered as readily to the name of Don as if he had always borne it.

The horses needed rest after the journey; but toward evening it was decided that they might be taken out for a short distance, and great was

the excitement in mounting, starting and comparing steeds.

"You are lucky to have the black, Gerald," said Vivian, "but you will see; I shall ride him yet."

"I do not know why not after a time; but you must get acquainted with him first."

"I feel acquainted already with my beautiful bay; do you know I believe I shall call her Bay Beauty, it suits her well. Do you think—" Vivian lowered her voice a little—"do you think there is any reason why a girl shouldn't groom a horse? I think I'd like to do it."

"Why? although I believe I know."

"Yes, it's because I wish Don Fulano to get used to me. I'll learn on Bay Beauty first for she is so gentle."

"There is one thing you ought to do if you go into the stables; you must dress for it. Those suits you girls call your cañon costumes are just the thing."

For a short distance they rode on without speaking, then Gerald said: "You have some great project on hand; I see it trembling in the corner of your left eye."

"Not one, but two great projects."

"May I know what they are?"

"One is to ride Don Fulano; the other is to see the ghost of Castle Silent."

Gerald looked at her keenly: "You are not afraid of a ghost?"

"No, I dearly love a ghost story; but this one has not half enough to it. Can't you add something and make it more weird for me?"

"I might if I knew what line you wished me to choose. Would a murder be to your taste or should there be hidden money, or what?"

"No, not a murder, and money is not romantic; but I can't seem to realize the ghost of that princess."

"I should think not. It's all arrant nonsense."

"How do you suppose that the idea of the house being haunted got about?"

"Oh, ignorant people always make up stories about empty houses."

"You do not believe in the ghost then; I was afraid you didn't."

"No, I don't believe in the ghost, but what I do believe is—"

"Now don't explain it away. I wouldn't give up that ghost for anything and I mean to go and see it sometime."

"But you couldn't."

"That is what the girls say; but I mean to run away some night and try."

"You do look at this moment as if you would try some such crazy thing."

"Now that isn't nice of you and I had counted on you to help me."

"Promise me something."

"What?"

"That you will tell me before riding Don Fulano and that you will put this ghost idea out of your head."

"I won't promise the last part."

"Well, promise me that you will not attempt the ghost until you can ride Fulano."

"Agreed."

"I can help you about Fulano now as much as you like."

"What do you mean?"

"Mrs. Howe has invited me to come and stay at The Beeches."

"How very jolly; and will you come?"

"I'd like to if I thought I wouldn't make myself a nuisance."

"The idea—as if you could. And when will you come?"

"To-morrow. The lodge will be closed, you know, for my uncle has gone."

"And isn't he coming back? I wanted to see him."

"My uncle, why?"

"Oh, no reason in particular, only I'd gotten an idea that he must be nicer than uncles generally are. I have one uncle who is a perfect dear and the way you speak of Mr. Raymond makes me think he might be like him."

"I wish Uncle Hugh would stay here. He is the best company of anyone I know; but he is off this time for a longer trip than usual. He

goes first to the Continent and later to Egypt and up the Nile."

"Does he travel just for pleasure?"

"No, he has always been interested in archæology and this time he is going into it rather more deeply than before."

"Why doesn't he write about his discoveries, or hasn't he made any?"

"He does write scientific articles. I'll show you some if you'd like to see them."

"I'd just love to; but I hope they are not entirely beyond my comprehension."

Gerald looked at her with an amused smile: "Wouldn't you rather read novels?" he said.

"Not all of the time. I am not so half frivolous as you think."

"I didn't say you were frivolous."

"No, but you looked it. Oh, see, there they come!"

They had gotten well ahead but the others now joined them,making a fine appearance,and inciting their horses to greater speed.

Gerald made an effort to keep at Vivian's side; but she said: "Let Fulano go, I want to see him," and away he flew, breaking into a splendid run. At first it seemed as if he would easily distance all of the others; but Ernest's chestnut, roused to emulation, followed rapidly and when Gerald reined in his proud pet, Allan was not far behind and Tina and Sidney soon joined them. "I say,

fellows," said Sidney, "you are very fine and dashy; but I'll back this sorrel on an all day's trial against any horse in the lot."

Each rider had some good word for his or her particular steed, Ruth declaring that her gray was better than all the bays and blacks in the world.

On the homeward road were more level stretches as well as shaded paths and the party reached The Beeches flushed with pleasure and full of the delights of their first ride.

Having schemes of her own, Vivian was quick to discover signs of them elsewhere, and later in the evening she called out to Sidney and Allan who were in earnest conversation on the piazza. "Plotting, plotting," she said, "I must come and break it up." But in the face of suspicion they disappeared later in the evening and were gone much longer than they had expected to be. Mr. Howe was not surprised when Allan walked into his study in rather a dishevelled condition.

"Chickens?" asked the gentleman interrogatively.

"Not chickens this time, dogs."

"Were you bitten? Where is Sidney?"

"Quite safe in his room brushing up. I came to tell you that I have had the misfortune to kill a cur that attacked me. We were detained because the owner threatened all sorts of terrible things; but a neighbor kindly volunteered the

information that the dog should have been killed long ago for he was a public nuisance. Then we were permitted to make our adieux."

"Ten days ago Sidney reported," said Mr. Howe with a twinkle in his eye; "to-day it is you. Shall I make an appointment for you both together, ten days hence?"

"It might be well," said Allan, with a merry glance as he left the room.

CHAPTER VIII.

A SCHEME THAT WAS GRANDMOTHERED.

"It would be a great lark," said Sidney.

"The fun of it would be the surprise," added Gerald.

"Yes; the girls are so sure we cannot do anything of the kind."

Just then they came upon Nelson, who had been cutting down a dead tree near the wood path. Allan was coming towards them from the opposite direction.

"If I don't miscalkerlate more'n usual," said Nelson, "you young gentlemen have got a pretty piece of mischief afoot."

"What makes you think so, Nelson?"

"Oh, there's reasons."

"We want you to help us," said Gerald.

"Want'll be your master then," and Nelson sat down deliberately on the trunk of the fallen tree.

"Yes," said Sidney, "you'll have to help us you know, and Allan, we need you for our other conspirator."

"Conspirator? No treason against the state I trust, nor disloyalty to my lady of The Beeches?"

"None whatever."

"I am already accused of midnight prowlings," said Allan, "and I am quite ready. But tell me, is there glory in the scheme, or gold, or chance of prison damp and chains?"

"Nothing but pure unadulterated fun," answered Sidney.

"And hard work," added Gerald.

"Ah, I see. The light of common day breaks through. You have a scheme, a fine project of your finer brains. But to carry it out you need a plain assistant. Well, look at me; for all my language is so fine, I still am but a simple yeoman. Command me, sirs, am I to climb, or dig, or fell the forest tree? In truth 'tis chopping suits me best."

Allan picked up the axe, leaned upon it, and pulling his forelock, assumed an expression of the most abject submission to his elected superiors.

"Nonsense, Allan," said Sidney laughing, "come here."

"He's practisin' for the stage I take it?" inquired Nelson.

"Well, we don't want any stage effects just now, and the grand coup de theatre will take some time to prepare."

"Let's have it then," and Allan tossed back the hair from his forehead and threw himself on the ground to listen. The other boys seated

themselves one on each side of Nelson on the fallen tree.

"It's Gerald's idea, let him tell," said Sidney.

"It is about this idea of Mr. Howe's," replied Gerald. "The girls are learning to make bread and coffee, you know."

"I heerd somethin' from Hannah," said Nelson, "but I thought it was only play."

"No, dead earnest," said Sidney; "but I should think the girls would make a mess of it. Just think of Vivian and Ruth in the kitchen."

"Tina might get on if there was no one to tease her," said Allan.

"Yes, and perhaps Helen," added Sidney; "but I should as soon think of the other girls in the stables grooming a horse as baking bread. Ruth does makes sponge cake, but that's nothing."

"But what was it you wanted me to help you about?" asked Nelson. "I tell you right here I aint goin' in fur no nonsense."

"It isn't nonsense," answered Sidney, "it's serious about the girls' cooking."

"I guess we'll find it serious if we have to eat what they cook," said Allan.

"But we won't have to if we don't like. Tell Al about it, Gerald."

"My uncle you know has no end of fads, and one of them is cooking. He is a friend of Mr. Howard Parkinson."

"Who is that?" asked Allan.

"Why, don't you know, in Boston? The man who is always writing something about Political Economy. He is at the head of a big business but he would rather be a Count Rumford than President of the United States."

"Wal, I should say so," said Nelson, "most Americans would; but see here, boys, I don't think much of a real born Yankee who goes hankerin' after foreign titles."

"Nor I," said Allan.

"Pshaw," said Gerald, "that isn't what I mean. Count Rumford was a man of many titles, which he won himself; but he cared more about his cookery than anything else, and he invented a lot of things to cook with. Mr. Parkinson is like him in inventing things, and he says he wishes his epitaph to be: 'He taught the American People how to stew.'"

"Wal, I'm glad he aint the other sort. And he's a friend of your uncle's eh?"

"Yes," answered Gerald, "and we had some cooking machines made like his when we went into the north woods last year. Uncle did cook the jolliest things, and I helped until I could do nearly as well. We invented new dishes and had no end of sport."

"So you want to set up opposition to the girls, do ye? Now I'd advise ye to keep out o' that kitchen and go fishin'."

"Out of the kitchen. Bless you, we have no idea of going into the kitchen. If I only had those cookers here it would be easy; but he left them up in the woods."

"Can't you send for them?" asked Sidney.

"No, they were given away, and besides there are improvements by this time. I'm going up to Boston to see Mr. Parkinson, get some cookers and ask him all sorts of questions about what he is doing with them now, so as to have all the new ideas."

"You need lamps, too, do you not?"

"Lamps," said Allan, "what do you need lamps for?"

"These machines are run entirely by lamps. No coal nor any fuss of any kind, and you see we can cook meals without anybody suspecting how or where, and so make a tremendous surprise."

"And Nelson," said Sidney, "we want the smoke-house cleared out to put the cookers in."

"That little place?" exclaimed Allan.

"Little place! guess you've never been in it. It's the biggest smoke-house in all the country round. No end of things are stored in there now. And you'll clear them all out won't you, Nelson?" Nelson laughed and chuckled and shook his head and took off his hat to wipe his forehead with his red handkerchief.

"So the smoke house is all you want is it? Wal, wal, the smoke-house!"

When Gerald came back from Boston,the eagerness with which Sidney and Allan greeted him and the animated conjultation which they held together, aroused Vivian's suspicions and she said:—"Girls, let's make Gerald tell what he went to Boston for."

"Now boys out with it," she said as they came up on the piazza, "what are you scheming about? Allan, you do not look quite so wicked as the others; suppose you tell us."

"Certainly, with pleasure. We three boys had a discussion some days ago as to whether Boston Common was as large as Central Park and Gerald went up to measure it so as to make sure."

"I hope there is nothing," said Miss Howe, "that will interfere with a trip to the cañon to-morrow."

"Oh,is it to-morrow?" and Sidney exchanged a quick look with Allan.

"I am afraid, Miss Howe," said Gerald,"that I must excuse myself from the party; I am very sorry."

"There is only one Boston Common to measure," suggested Vivian mischievously.

"And Aunt Margaret, Allan and I promised to help Nelson with some work to-morrow," added Sidney.

"It is quite too bad," said Mr. Howe, "but we must not interfere with any disinterested ef-

forts on your part; perhaps we can plan another trip to the cañon later."

There was never a more beautiful morning than dawned on the morrow.

"I suppose," Mr. Grafton looked mischievous as the mountain wagon came up to the door, that it will be my duty to stay with the young gentlemen who have elected to remain at home."

"No you don't," whispered Sidney in his ear.

"It is unquestionably your duty, Mr. Grafton," answered Mrs. Howe, who stood smiling on the piazza, "but I will relieve you of the responsibility, I will take charge of them while you are away."

At last they were off and Sidney threw his arms around his grandmother's neck, saying,— "You never mean to be an old lady do you, dear?"

"Not, at least, until you children are grown up," she answered; "but now tell me what you are going to do. How can I be responsible for you otherwise?"

"We should love to tell you," and he placed a chair and a footstool where she would be most comfortable, as they all grouped themselves near her.

"You know Gerald went to Boston?"

"Yes I know."

"He went up to see Mr. Parkinson and get his cooking machines."

"Cooking machines! What are you going to do with them?"

"Cook and surprise the girls."

"Where can you put them so that the others will not know? I do not see how you are going to keep your secret."

"In the smoke-house, grandmama."

How his grandmother laughed! You would have thought one of the young girls was listening to the scheme. "But," she said, "I do not see how you are to manage, and which of you is the cook?"

"Gerald knows more about it than any of us; but we have all been studying up."

"I think," said Allan, "that you can do almost anything fairly well if you only set yourself about it."

"Then you know, grandmama, that Nelson is a famous cook and he thinks, I am sure, that it will be a great lark."

"He wouldn't admit it for the world," said Gerald.

"Oh, no. He says it's a girl's business to cook and a boy's business to pick up chips."

"I begin to comprehend," said Mrs. Howe, "why you boys were so interested in the bread making. Do you think you can do that?"

"Yes, indeed, and ever so much better."

Mrs. Howe held up a warning finger: "Slowly, slowly," she said, "good bread is not so easily made."

"Sidney does not mean better bread," explained Allan; "but made in a better way."

"Let me hear."

"When you set bread over night it is subject to variations of temperature and liable not to be light at the right time."

"That is true."

"Then the girls have to be up so early in the morning when they expect the bread to be nice, and I should think that would be a bore."

"That is a trouble sometimes; how do you propose to help it?"

"Mr. Parkinson told us about a contrivance called a bread-raiser. A simple cupboard affair with a glass door. At the top there is a shelf and on this you put the pan with the bread."

"The sponge, you mean."

"Yes, and below this is a shallow pan for water and under this a little lamp. The moist heat raises the bread in about three hours."

"And the baking?"

"Oh, that is the beautiful part. You put the loaves in the oven for two hours and never have to look at them until they are done."

"What kind of pans do you put the loaves in?"

Sidney looked at Allan, then at Gerard. A blank expression settled on all their faces.

Mrs. Howe laughed again. "It is a good scheme," she said, "but it lacks a grandmother.

You would better give me an inventory of the things you have and let me tell you what you lack."

"Ship ahoy, aho-oy!" called Nelson, who was looking for the boys.

"Aye, aye!" they shouted in chorus.

"We have to clear out the smoke-house first, you know, grandmama, and Nelson is calling us," said Sidney.

As they approached the little brick building Allan, who was in advance, put out his hand to lift the latch of the low, red door.

"Don't!" exclaimed Gerald, drawing him back with a quick movement.

"Why, what is the matter?"

"Don't you see that big cob-web across the top of the door in that corner over the latch?"

"I can brush it off. I'm not afraid of that spider if he is a big one."

"But they won't know if that is there."

"I catch on," said Sidney. "King David in the cave where the spider spun a web and his enemies thought he wasn't there."

"Wal now," said Nelson, "that is a good one."

"Can we work from the other side?" asked Sidney.

"Of course we can; but it will take time and you'll hev to go and ask Mrs. Howe's permission to knock a door through on the other side."

Extending back from the smoke-house was a frame addition which had been used as a work-shop but which was now filled with rubbish. A door opened into this from one side and as they went in they understood what Nelson meant by another door.

Mrs. Howe entered heartily into the plan. "You are a good mason, Nelson," she said. "I can trust you to make a doorway there without doing any harm."

"But we haven't any door."

"Might put up a portiere."

"What's that?" and Allan explained.

"Gosh, that's jest the thing!" Nelson did not often use such expressions; but he was electrified. "Come now, set to work if you mean business," he said.

"Indeed we do," said Gerald, whose quick, comprehensive glance took in the whole situation. Immediately he formulated a plan of action and began with the others to carry it out. He was a natural leader although there was no assumption of authority.

"Shall we pile up these boards, Nelson? Could we have the cart to carry off this rubbish? Do you think it would be safe for us to start the door or would you rather do that alone?" were some of the questions which were asked and which started hands and feet in busy co-operation.

"I reckon I'd better tend to the wall; you youngsters can tackle the rest."

They worked with a will and after a time Mrs. Howe came again to see. "How are you getting on, Nelson?" she asked.

"Wal, Mrs. Howe, all I've got to say is, thet if these boys work as well at their trades when they start out as they hev in this ere smoke-house, the folks that comes in contact with 'em'll have to hustle,thet's all. We've got through what Mr. Gerald calls the 'coniclastic part an' now we're goin' in fur reconstruction."

"When we have done a little more, grandmama, we are going up to the freight office for the cookers and bread-raiser."

"Ken ye manage it without me?" said Nelson. "I've got a little job on hand here yet."

"What are you going to do, Nelson?"

"Wal, I did calkerlate I'd set about makin' thet air portyare."

"What are you going to make it out of?"

"Cobwebs, I reckon."

"Oh, pshaw! What are you going to make it of?"

"Embroidery, I guess."

"I don't believe you know yourself."

"You're mightily mistaken then. You jest wait till you see it."

"But what is it?"

"You'll find out a good deal sooner if you

jest go up arter them machines an' leave me to finish up here."

"My kingdom for a Turkish bath!" said Allan, as they started for the house to brush up enough to go the village.

"If you had it just after the meal you ate such a short while ago," said Gerald, "it wouldn't be long before you'd want a Turkish towel large enough for a winding sheet."

"I believe I did distinguish myself," Allan admitted; "but I had to eat more than was good for me so that you would not feel out of countenance."

"Thanks, tremendously. What is this, Mrs. Howe?"

"A list of the cooking utensils which I think you will need. And the second part is a list of provisions which perhaps better be stored outside if you wish to preserve absolute secrecy."

"What a capital idea. I've heard of many a scheme that was fathered; but they can't hold a candle to one that is grandmothered."

CHAPTER IX.

NELSON'S PORTYARE.

When the boys had driven away, Nelson turned his attention to the portiere. He decided that the ventilator at the top of the house would have to be opened to make the air thoroughly fresh after the opening leading into the workshop was closed. Then he brought from the stables an old buffalo robe, and held it up to see if it were large enough to cover the open space, but it was too short.

"Seems like that wouldn't do," he said, as he laid the robe down on the work bench and stood a moment to consider.

"I've kinder set my mind on that, too. What's this Mr. Howe's allus a sayin': 'Our apparent failures are sometimes our greatest successes.' Wal now, Nels, you jest see if you can't figger thet out."

A sudden thought struck him. With a chuckle it was a pity the boys could not have heard, he began to carry out a new idea. Some trips to the stables were necessary for a large needle, waxed thread, pieces of discarded surcingle and

two iron spikes which were needed as the work progressed.

The spikes were driven carefully into the wall, loops were sewed on two corners of the skin, which was then suspended from the spikes. When he found that it hung to his satisfaction he took it down and spread it upon the bench. Gimlets, augers, chisels, screw-drivers and other small tools were arranged and rearranged upon it until they assumed an appearance of symmetry. The strips of surcingle were stitched on in such shape that they would hold the tools of different sizes, and then the skin was rehung and the tools fitted on it according to Nelson's design. The work bench was now pushed against the smoke house wall so that the back of it, which was made of matched boards, held firmly the buffalo robe and hid completely the open space below.

He had just finished when the boys drove up. "Where's the machines?" he called out; "I told ye thet freight agent wa'n't any good."

"Here they are, all right."

"What! them little things."

"Is the portyare done?" asked Gerald.

"Wal, I reckon. You jest come an' see," and he led the way proudly into the shop.

"I say, Nelson, you're a genius," said Gerald.

"Indeed he is," added the other boys.

"Wal, now, ye just take in all the pints about

this, will ye? The bench is easy to move an' who'd ever think of a door bein' behind it?"

"Capital. Great head."

"What do ye think o' that portyare, anyhow?"

"I think it is the most original one I ever saw," said Allan.

"It's more than that," added Gerald, "it's artistic."

"We've got some provisions, Nelson," said Sidney, "but it seems to me it would be rather stuffy to put them in the smoke house; don't you think so!"

"No need o' that. There's plenty o' room out here."

"But we can't have them seen, you know."

"No need to hev 'em seen. You bring up some o' them packin' boxes thet you've emptied out in the carriage house. They ken be put along thet side out o' the way, an' nobody'd ever think o' lookin' under them; 'specially if I keep a few shavin's an' a little sawdust strewed around convenient."

The picnic party came home tired; but such an enthusiastic crowd they were.

"It is a shame boys that you did not go," said Vivian. "You have no idea what you missed because you were too lazy to climb and wanted to stay home and loaf."

"They do not look much as if had had been loafing," said Miriam.

"Indeed they do not," said Ruth. "Why Sidney, you have quite a wound on this finger. Let me see your hands, Gerald, and yours, Allan. What have you been doing?"

"Making scientific researches, your ladyship, in the hope of finding some prehistoric remains."

"Oh, how you boys do fib; but we'll find you out, we've quite made up our minds to that."

Ralph took it for granted that Allan would tell him as soon as it was possible, what they had been about. "Of course they don't want to tell the girls," he said to himself; "but he'll tell me."

When the picnickers went to their rooms Allan went into the library to read. In a few minutes Ralph came down and would have joined him but Ernest was there.

"Yes," Allan was saying, "I'll ask Mr. Howe if you do not wish to; but you know he likes nothing better than to be asked such questions."

"Little beggar," muttered Ralph, as he turned on his heel and went out of doors. "Little beggar, to come here and have everything, even a horse, and then he's going to ask Uncle Earle for something else. He's afraid to ask, himself, so he gets Allan to do it, and Al. is so good-natured he'd do anything for anybody. I'll tell him he must stop it."

"Look out," called Sidney, "don't hurl your colossal frame against me that way. What's the matter with you anyway?"

"Matter enough," said Ralph, for once roused out of his indifference. "Allan is making a fool of himself and Ernest's a sneak."

Sidney's baseball muscles gave a tremendous twitch but they rebounded and he said:

"You're mad Ralph, mad as a hornet, and you're outrageously insulting besides."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean what I say. Ernest is my friend and you'd better take back what you said mighty quick."

"Why see here, Sid, don't you know what I mean?"

"No, I don't, and I guess you don't either," said Sidney, getting excited as Ralph cooled down.

"Well, it's just this. Of course you and I are Uncle Earle's heirs; and although he's a rich man, he isn't so awful rich, and here's Ernest getting into his good graces and he's going to ask for something, I don't know what."

"I'd feel mean to talk that way, Ralph. It sounds as if we were counting on dead men's shoes."

"I don't think so at all. It won't be long before I'll be ready to go into business and of course I expect Uncle Earle to give me a start, and so do you."

"I don't. I'd rather make my own way than to have anybody start me."

"That's all very fine; but we can't start now-a-days and work up as our grandfathers did if we expect to be rich men."

"I don't expect to be a rich man."

"I do."

Sidney turned without answering and started for the house. Ralph followed and they reached the dining room just in time to sit down with the others.

"Oh, I wish we knew which crew came in ahead!" and Ruth settled her gown of pale blue lawn with a pretty im patience. "It will be hours yet before we can hear, won't it Uncle Earle?"

"No, I arranged for a special telegram to be sent up," he answered.

"You did!" exclaimed Vivian, clapping her hands. "You did! Oh, isn't he a dear?" This last to Tina who sat in mute admiration of Vivian's crimson crepon, which suited so well her dark hair and brilliant eyes.

"What a pity," said Sidney, "that you and Ruth are so overwhelmingly true blue, so to speak, you won't dare cheer if the other fellows come out ahead."

"Oh, yes we will; but if you are true blue for Yale, why didn't you put on a wider necktie?"

"On account of my native modesty," answered Sidney, taking from his pocket a closely folded handkerchief of blue silk, which he opened and opened until a shout of laughter greeted its phenomenal size.

"Made to order?" asked Mr. Grafton.

"Yes, we have a neighbor who has a silk manufactory and he had some of these made for a few of the fellows last year."

"Tina is wise," said Allan; "all in white. She can fling out any banner she chooses when the news comes."

"But Fred is at Cornell, he's in the crew"--Tina spoke proudly though timidly—"and I couldn't wear the blue or the crimson and I thought, I thought—"

"You thought," Mr. Howe helped her out, "that it might not be wise to wear your colors among such strong partisans; but Cornell has won, you know, and she may again. I hope she won't; but if she does I'll cheer with you. Haven't you a badge that you can pin on? Couldn't Minna get it for you?"

"Oh, may I?" And Tina, jumping up almost flew out of the door and up stairs, her suppressed excitement giving itself full sway at this unexpected permission.

When she came back, wearing a broad sash of red and white, with a knot of the same colors at her throat, Allan rose to place her chair. Then, rising for an instant on tip toe, he shook out a square of silk equal in size to Sidney's but made up of the Cornell colors sewed together.

"Plagiarist," exclaimed Sidney.

"Not at all. Quite my own original idea, for

I never saw yours until this evening. I am not exactly a man without a country, but a man without a college, and as Cornell was in the race, I was ready by way of variety to fly her colors if she won. If I'd only known about Tina now—"

"One never does know about Tina," said Sidney, "she is given to surprises."

Helen, who was near the center of the table, reached forward and drew from the bowl of flowers a large zinnia of deep orange which she fastened on a black bow at her belt. "I'm not in the race," she said, "but I may as well show my colors."

"Dear me, this won't do at all!" and Vivian, snapping off a crimson bow from either sleeve, tossed them to Gerald and Ernest, bidding them fasten them at once in a buttonhole.

Ralph, already out of sorts, did not know what to do. He had chosen Yale as his college because he wished to please Mr. Howe; but he began to think he would not go where Sidney did. Miriam looked at the other girls and then at her own gown. It was a charming grenadine, with sprays of delicate flowers; but nothing positive—nothing that could be combined with a flower or a simple ribbon. She asked herself whether she wished to adopt any of the college colors and could not find an answer to her question.

"Now is a good time to ask," Allan said to Ernest.

"Mr. Howe?"

"Yes, Ernest."

"Is it necessary to go to college?"

Sidney turned to Ralph who looked back defiantly; but all other eyes were fixed on Mr. Howe as he answered:

"Can you tell me a little more plainly what you mean by necessary?"

"I mean, to be a good business man, is it necessary to go to college?"

"You mean a successful business man."

"Yes."

"To that I should answer that some of our most successful business men have not been to college. Successful, that is, from a money making point of view."

"But isn't that success?" It was Ralph who asked.

"Yes and no," answered Mr. Howe.

"It wasn't the success that the old Greeks and Romans craved," said Sidney.

"It would be complete success," continued Mr. Howe, "if the aim of amassing fortune was to gain all the best things of life. I was talking only the other day with a wealthy friend of mine —a man sixty years of age—who told me that he took more pleasure in earning one dollar than he did in spending a thousand."

"Was he a college man?" asked Sidney.

"No, and I cannot help thinking, judging by

my own experience of men, that had he started with a college training his ideas would have been broadened so that he might have thoroughly enjoyed something beyond his dollars."

"Then you do think that college is necessary?"

"On general principles, yes."

"But," said Miriam, who was always at her best when a discussion was going on, "isn't a college life full of temptations for boys?"

"Miriam's brain is as full of questions as a hive is full of bees," said Allan to Miss Howe. "Does she never settle anything?"

"The world is full of temptations," answered Mr. Howe; "men are tested sooner or later, in college and out of it."

"Mighty poor timber if they can't stand the test," said Ralph; and then this serious conversation was broken in upon by the arrival of a telegram which brought them all to their feet.

"Harvard!" shouted Vivian and Gerald as Mr. Howe tore open the envelope.

"Yale!" exclaimed Ruth, stepping up on a chair and throwing up a hand ready to cheer.

Tina clasped her hands so tightly that they bore the marks of the nails afterward as she waited breathless for the words:—

"Cornell an easy winner."

Ruth was down in a flash. Tina was lifted to the chair, she did not know how or by whom;

Allan waved his colors; everybody cheered, cheered as heartily as they would have done had it been Harvard or Yale which had beaten instead of the less popular but for this time successful Cornell.

CHAPTER X.

THE CHALLENGE.

"Uncle Earle," said Sidney a few mornings later, "please lend me your glasses a moment."

"What for, may I ask?"

"I should like to look at Miriam through something more than my plain eyes. She looks like—"

"Like a woman with a mission," interrupted Allan.

"Yes, that is what I mean," assented Sidney.

"I have a mission," returned Miriam.

"One minute," said Allan; "let me pass the hat."

"Suppose the mission is a bad one," said Ralph, and everybody looked at him; it was so unusual for him to take part in their nonsense.

"We can scarcely suppose it a bad one; but possibly it may be an unwise one. Perhaps Miriam will explain before we decide upon the size of our contributions."

"It isn't a bad one and I know it is a wise one," she answered.

"Do tell us," said Allan; "I cannot wait another minute."

"You often keep us waiting about things," said Helen.

"Oh, yes, but that is different."

"I have noticed," said Vivian, "that things are apt to be different for boys. When they want anything they must have it right away or the world must cease to go round. Boys are so conceited."

"And haven't we as good a right to be conceited as girls? Think of you with your cookery; but wait till I show you my bread."

"Yes, I think we will wait," and Vivian laughed merrily.

Allan turned again to Miriam. "My ambition," she began, "is to give a complete dinner—"

"All yourself," interrupted Tina.

"Why of course, Tina; it's easy enough if one only gives sufficient time and thought to it."

"No practice required?" asked Allan.

"Not necessarily; any girl with average intelligence and a cook book can do it."

Mrs. Howe smiled indulgently, while Sidney inquired:—"What is a complete dinner?"

"The girls settled that some time ago; what do you boys say?"

"Beans, if you have enough of them," answered Sidney.

"Fish and bread, if you catch the fish yourself," said Gerald.

"I wish that Miriam would give her idea," said Allan.

"What I say," answered Miriam, "is that I am going to cook a dinner such as none of you boys could surpass if you tried."

"It will have to be a very elaborate affair then," returned Allan. "I'll take you up on that."

"Don't be silly Al.," Ralph chimed in.

"I'm not silly. How many courses shall you have, Miriam?"

"As many as Mr. Howe likes. He says, you know, that five or six courses, not counting coffee, suit him much better than a larger number."

"The outside number, then—six. I understand this is a challenge; you can do it and we boys can not."

"Yes," said Sidney; "if she were a boy she would say, 'I'll bet diamonds to doughnuts that I can do it and you can't.'"

"Little necks first course, I suppose?" Allan put the question to Miriam.

"Yes."

"I take it for granted boys can dig as good ones as girls."

"I'll grant you that much."

"Possibly we can serve them a degree colder than you can; but we won't crow over your downfall yet."

"I should think not." Then Miriam spoke to Mrs. Howe in a tone so low that the others did not hear.

"Don't pause, next course please."

"Clear soup with poached eggs."

Allen started up and took one or two anxious steps but Gerald nodded to him reassuringly.

"All right," he assented, "I'll undertake that course—next?"

"Baked fish."

"Good, go on, that makes three."

"Broiled beefsteak."

Oh!" exclaimed Vivian, "I believe you would put beefsteak into a cold collection, as Miss Vane's elegant collation was called the other day by one of the farmers."

This gave Allan a moment to recover himself. Broiling was one thing which the cooker could not do and he looked at Gerald to see what he thought; but Sidney was equal to the occasion.

"I'm desperately fond of beefsteak," he said, "but Miriam, is it quite a dinner dish? If we are to have a complete dinner ought not the dishes to be suitable?"

The boy was so gravely in earnest, it is a wonder that the girls did not suspect; but Mrs. Howe was the only one who realized the situation. She turned away in time to hide her smile, while Gerald whispered, "Saved!" in Sidney's ear.

"I suspect you are right and yet I hate to give it up for I have learned to broil beafsteak beautifully, but I suppose it must be a roast of some kind."

"I suggest roast beef," said Sidney.

"Very well, roast beef let it be."

"How many have we now? Clams, soup, fish, roast; only two more allowed."

"Salad and dessert," said Allan.

"The salad of course won't be cooked, and the dessert must be difficult; the most difficult that can be found."

"Oh, then you begin to think we might succeed, do you?"

"Not at all; but I feel that my mission is to so completely overwhelm you that you will be modest for the future."

"And what is your hardest dessert?"

"One that sounds very simple; but Mrs. Howe told me that it was one of the hardest to have perfect—the so called poor man's rice pudding. I say it should be rich man's, for it is a great deal of milk to a very little rice and the milk must be very rich indeed or else the pudding will not be suited to a fastidious taste."

"One of the dishes which came perfect from the old-fashioned brick ovens," added Mrs. Howe.

"When shall you give this dinner?"

Miriam turned to Mrs. Howe:—"When may I give it?" she asked.

"Any day that you please."

"Then I choose to-morrow."

Miriam's anxious look the next morning made Sidney say:

"If you are to attempt such an Herculean task, do devitalize a little now at breakfast time."

Miriam smiled but did not answer.

"There is no use," said Allan, "she smiles; but it is a lofty superior smile, as if she would say, 'Poor dears, how little they appreciate.'"

"Don't mind them, Miriam, eat your breakfast," for she was letting her muffins grow cold.

"I have really finished and I must go now if I may be excused. Will you come as soon as you can, girls?"

After luncheon when they had again gathered in the kitchen, Hannah asked: "Will you tell me, please, what there will be for dinner, so that I can lay the table."

"We begin with clams," said Miriam.

"And," interrupted Helen, "please serve them on those plates with the seaweed. You would like that, wouldn't you, Miriam?"

"Yes, but I shouldn't have thought about the plate."

"That's where cooperation comes in, and it makes such a difference how a thing is served."

"And what else?" asked Hannah.

"There will be soup, fish, roast with vegetables, salad, creamed rice and coffee."

Hannah gave an astonished look around the kitchen; but, remembering her express orders from Mrs. Howe, quickly withdrew in search of that lady instead of going at once to the dining room.

"You ought to make the pudding, don't you think so Miriam, so that it can be thoroughly cooled in time?"

"Yes," answered Miriam, "it can go right in with the bread."

"I cannot see," said Helen, "how you are to do it all."

"Oh, it is easy enough," answered the amateur cook; "but help me with this now, if you will. The rice pudding is so plain I am going to make Bavarian cream, and it must be simply elegant."

"With all my heart; I love elegant things."

There was considerable delay about this dish for the cream would not whip satisfactorily at first; but they were all too keenly interested to notice the rapid flight of time and at last it was pronounced a complete success.

A few minutes after Hannah left the kitchen, Mrs. Howe appeared at the door; but the girls were so occupied that they did not notice her. She smiled as she saw the business air of the young cooks, took a hasty survey of the situa-

tion, and then, returning to the hall, rang for Nelson.

"Can you find Sidney for me?" she asked.

"I'm afraid not, Mrs. Howe, he's so busy just now. Would Mr. Gerald do?"

"Quite as well; here he comes now."

"Can I do anything for you, Mrs. Howe?" he enquired.

"I knew you boys were busy with your Cookers this afternoon and I wish to ask if you have started anything in them."

"Yes, we began this morning. We thought we would test them with something cheap, so we started beans and then we made Boston brown bread. The beans look fine; but we cannot tell about the bread; it hasn't come out yet."

"Will it be done by six o'clock?"

"Yes, indeed."

"Did you make only a little to test the ovens, or is there enough to show your skill?"

"Nelson says we have enough for a regiment; and the pan of beans is rather large; but may I ask why you wish to know?"

"I think we may need them at the house if you are disposed to be generous. The girls are working very hard; but, from present indications, I fear that they will be disappointed."

"I suppose I must not ask any more?"

"No, I'll not tell any tales out of school; only be ready if I call upon you."

"We will, you may count upon us."

"Why don't you tell me what to do with the vegetables, Miriam," said Tina, "since there are so many things?"

"Martha insisted upon helping me get them ready, although I begged her not to touch anything. Now I'll put over these beans and then we'll take the others."

"Don't you think it was foolish to attempt bread too, for to-day? And what about the pudding?"

"Good gracious! I've forgotten all about the pudding," said Miriam, starting for the oven.

"And it's time to put in the beef"—Helen handed the dripping-pan to her.

When the oven door was opened a strong smell of burning bread greeted their nostrils, and it took but a glance to see that the pudding, which should have cooked very slowly, had boiled over.

"Oh, dear! Oh, what a pity!" exclaimed the other girls; but Miriam did not utter a sound.

"I am afraid the fire was too hot," said Helen.

"It will be just right for the beef," added Tina, "and how fortunate it is that you have the Bavarian cream."

Miriam did not answer. It suddenly occurred to her that there might be something wrong with the fire and she lifted one of the covers to see. A little tap with the stove lifter and down went the coals, showing that underneath the fire was all burned out.

She gave a gasp and sank down in a chair. "It is perfectly hopeless," she exclaimed, "the beef will never roast and I cannot do a single thing."

"And here is the coal," said Tina, "if we had only known enough to put it on."

"Don't say we," wailed Miriam. "It's nobody's fault but just my own. I might have let Martha stay, but I wouldn't. I had no right to attempt so much when I knew so little."

"Well, it really won't matter," said Helen; "except for the pudding, the rest of the dinner is not spoiled, and you know we can have a chafing dish supper. Oh, Mrs. Howe!" she exclaimed in relief as that lady appeared at the door, for she felt herself but a poor comforter.

Miriam was covered with confusion and she turned away to hide her tears of mortification.

"Never mind, my dear," said Mrs. Howe, "I am quite sure I understand. Go right to your room to rest and get ready for dinner. Hannah will come down at once and we shall do nicely."

"But I don't want to rest and I don't want any dinner."

For answer Mrs. Howe put her arm around the young girl and, drawing her out of the kitchen, carried her off to her own room.

Helen and Tina went to their rooms quite content about their friend, for they had learned that Mrs. Howe had a way of putting things so

that it was even possible to meet the quizzical teasing of the boys after a talk with her.

But this was more serious than anything that had happened before. The time was too short for Miriam to rally and the rest sat down to the table without her.

At first there seemed to be nothing to eat. Mrs. Howe sat calmly in her place; Aunt Margaret expectantly in hers.

"I dearly love surprises," said Miss Howe, "but,mother,you promised us something to eat."

"Yes," said Mr. Howe, "and it is not the little bear's portion that will satisfy me."

"I am waiting for the rest of the boys," was the serene reply.

"We shall have to eat the boys then," said Ruth. "I don't see anything else."

At this moment Sidney entered the dining-room carrying an immense dish of baked beans. Allan and Gerald followed, each holding a platter on which rested loaves of steaming brown bread, all of which were deposited on the table while Hannah brought butter from the pantry and Minna began to fill the glasses.

"Is this a huge joke," asked Mr. Howe, "or are they good to eat?"

"They are the most eatable brown bread and beans you ever tasted."

"Where did they come from?"

"They are some that Gerald brought back

from Boston and has kept locked up ever since, to be brought out for such an emergency,''said Sidney.

"No, where did they come from?'' said Ruth. "The beans are good and, grandmama, this brown bread is like that you used to make for us long ago.''

"I think this is even better,'' said Mrs.Howe, "but it is much like mine.''

"I know,'' said Vivian, "Martha has been gone all day; you asked her to make them and have just brought them over hot."

"No,Martha had nothing whatever to do with them."

"I don't care who did it,'' said Sidney,"until I have had some more. I haven't any time for curiosity; it's just all filled with appreciation.''

"They are good,'' said Ralph.

"First,'' said Ernest, "I thought the beans were better than the bread and now I think the bread is better than the beans; which is it?''

"Both,'' promptly responded Helen. "Allan where did you get them?''

"I suppose you know that if you bore down far enough through the earth's crust, you come to fire. If you do not go quite to the fire you have a nice oven and if you find a moist spot you have steam. All you need to do is to find the right places, put in your bread and beans and there you are.''

"Oh, dear, this is getting too harrowing," said Ruth. "Will nobody tell us?"

That evening Allan said: "Please take notice all of you that I am here."

"To be sure; we all see you."

"But I should like to be put under guard. To-morrow when somebody tries to prove that I was somewhere else I wish to prove that I was here."

"All right, old fellow," said Ralph, "I'll watch you."

"I think I'll help," said Mr. Grafton. "I believe I see eastern jugglery in prospect."

"The more the better," said Allan, and then the subject was dropped.

The next morning some of the boys were up early, Allan among them; but they went their several ways and nobody but Nelson knew that Allan had beaten up the sponge for four loaves of bread and set it to rise in the little cupboard with the glass door which they called the bread raiser. He asked Nelson to light the lamp under the oven at ten o'clock so he was perfectly free until eleven.

And he seemed to be everywhere. He was offering to do something for everybody until Miss Howe declared that there seemed to be two or three Allans that morning.

"Do take him with you, Miss Howe," said Vivian, "he needs occupation."

"If he would like to come. Allan, I am going

to the village at half past eleven, will you drive me?"

"With the greatest pleasure. Shall I order your horse?"

"If you will," and Allan left the room at five minutes before eleven.

He found that his thermometer marked a correct temperature for the oven. Hastily kneading the bread he divided it into loaves and set the pans in the bread raiser for the little time that they would need. Then he ordered the horse, went back into the cave, put the pans of bread in the oven, shut it tight, and left word with Nelson if he were not back at half past one o'clock to take out the loaves.

"Why that's two hours,' said Nelson.

"I know it; it takes two hours in that thing."

As he drove to the door Allan wore the careless air of one who has absolutely nothing to do.

"How lazy you look," said Helen who had not witnessed all his earlier activity; "I hope Miss Howe will make you do errands for her."

"I am sure I should be very glad," said Allan, affecting to yawn.

They were home again in good time. All were seated at table except Allan, who was missing.

"I don't think that I made Allan late," said Miss Howe. "But here he comes now, and what can he be bringing?"

Mrs. Howe looked up quickly, as all the others did, and this time she was surprised with the rest.

Allan no longer wore a lazy look. He walked proudly erect,carrying a tray on which something was piled, covered with a large napkin.

"By your leave," he said, with a bow to Mrs. Howe, as he put the tray down in front of Vivian, took off the napkin and displayed four evenly baked, crusty loves of delicious looking bread.

Mrs. Howe looked greatly pleased. A prolonged "Oh-h!" was heard from both sides of the table.

"Miss Russell," said Allan, "you say that you love hot bread, and as you have not baked any yet for yourself I have done it for you."

"But you didn't do it," said Vivian, lifting a loaf delicately and turning it around to see its perfection on all sides.

"I did do it all my own self. Set it, kneaded it, baked it, without any help."

"When did you set it?" asked Ruth, incredulously; "you were here all the evening."

"You did it after we were in bed," said Helen.

"No," answered Ralph, "I locked his door and opened it this morning,and he can't climb down from his windows."

"I don't set bread at night," said Allan.

"Oh, don't you?" said Tina. "Do tell me how you do it? I believe in saving time."

"Yes," said Ruth, "you have been mysterious long enough; where is your kitchen?"

"Why don't you find out?"

"We girls will if the boys don't. I should think they would before this time."

"It is more fun not to know," said Ernest; "when we get ready we shall unearth you."

Ralph, who had been rather indifferent, said: "I suppose you have an oil stove somewhere."

"I do not think you would by any stretch of the imagination call it a stove," said Gerald.

"There is only one whose acuteness I fear," said Allan. "Tina has the inventive genius, and I suspect that she will begin to dig for an oven. The earth's crust is large; but it would be fair play for her to choose a spot next mine and spoil it."

CHAPTER XI.

ALLAN'S CONSPIRACY.

After Ernest's question to Mr. Howe at the dinner table, he felt less shy about talking of himself and Mr. Howe was most ready to listen.

"I want to work for my mother now," said Ernest to him one day, "and she says I must go to college."

"If your mother were an old lady, perhaps you would be right; but as there will probably be many years in which you can contribute to her comfort I should say it is your duty to do as she wishes."

"But suppose I should fail, or do something that was not right?"

"How could you fail to keep right with such a mother?"

"But, Mr. Howe, she gives up too much for me now; you don't begin to know what she gives up for me."

"Very well," answered Mr. Howe, "then let us look at it from the other side. A man need not necessarily become narrow because he has not had the benefit of college life. He certainly

could not do well in college if he felt all of the time that he ought to be somewhere else."

"That is how I should feel."

"And if you give up college, what is your idea?"

"Anything that would take us into the country. Mother loves the country and dislikes town. It seems to me since I have been here that I could keep bees or something."

Mr. Howe smiled at the indefiniteness of occupation; but had no time to reply for the boys were calling:

"Ernest, Ernest, where are you, aren't you coming?"

"We will talk about this again," said Mr. Howe, "they are waiting now."

As Ernest passed out Mrs. Howe entered the room. "What shall we do for Ernest?" she asked; "has he been talking to you?"

"Yes, has he spoken to you?"

"Not directly, but he talks with Sidney and Sidney with me. I wish it were possible to please the mother by sending the boy to college, and yet have him fully retain his self-respect."

"I wish so too; but I am afraid it is not. Ernest has the elements of a strong character if he is rightly guided and trained; and yet I feel that he is not strong enough to do his best against weakening influences."

"He doesn't seem to wish to go to college except to please his mother."

"No, and he feels that he should not let her make the necessary sacrifices to send him. If he consents to the sacrifice, even to please her, will it not show weakness on his part?"

"It is a nice question," answered Mr. Howe. "The tendency of most young persons of to-day is to throw off all restraint of their elders and follow their own inclinations entirely."

"You know I do not quite agree with you there. I feel that older persons have lost touch with the younger ones and that they have largely brought about this state of things themselves."

"And then we always come to the same conclusion, that each particular case has to be dealt with in its own particular way, and one cannot meddle too much in other persons' affairs, you know."

"In this case I can see but one thing to be done," said Mrs. Howe.

"What is that?"

"To see the mother personally and persuade her to be satisfied with Ernest's success in some out-door occupation."

"And who is to provide the occupation?"

"Oh, that is for you to attend to," she said, smiling, "you know you always got into mischief unless I kept you busy. As for me, my thoughts at present are full of Miriam."

"What about Miriam? Can I help you?"

"I doubt if you can. A man of your temper-

ament would scarcely have patience with such a nature."

"Why, Miriam seems to me a very nice girl indeed; what is the matter with her?"

"She is a nice girl, one of the nicest girls I have ever known; but she is not a happy girl."

"Why not?"

"Ah, there's the trouble! It all lies with herself to change. She is introspective but to no purpose. She asks herself endless questions about herself. She mourns over trifles—she wears a hair shirt of penitence for sins which she does not commit and entirely overlooks the faults which, if eradicated, would make her a happy woman."

"Do you know what I would do if I were you?"

"What?"

"I would sit down in front of her and paint a clear picture of these faults which you see so plainly—and it does not occur to me to question your judgment—so that she might see herself as she really is; that is, if it would lead to her ultimate happiness."

"It is to save her from such a calamity, which some person may bring upon her, that I am puzzling over the matter. She believes herself to be the most unselfish of mortals when, in reality, she is in her own way very selfish."

"Selfishness makes anyone unhappy."

"It is the unconsciousness of being selfish

that causes the unhappiness. She feels that something is wrong and she does not know what. Then she feels that the world is somehow out of joint and that somebody is to blame because she does not accomplish the many things which she is always dreaming about. She does not see that it is all her own doing. She does not know what to give up nor how to concentrate her energies. She is so sure of herself and her untried energies that it makes failure doubly bitter."

"I remember now," said Mr. Howe, "that her letter to Ruth was rather pathetic and I did feel sorry at the way the poor child's dinner turned out. But there is nothing like association with other young people to smooth out such kinks. You will see; she will be a different girl when this vacation is over; there are just the right elements here for her to mix with."

"What is it, Nelson?" as that ubiquitous individual appeared at the door. "Oh yes, the mail. I didn't know that it was so late. Mother, you are so entertaining that time and tide stand still in your company."

The arrival of the mail was the signal for the gathering of the whole party if they were anywhere within call, and to-day no one had strayed away.

"I have a letter from Mr. Parkinson," announced Mr. Howe, when all the company had taken time to scan hastily home letters and other news.

"Oh, is he coming? Is he coming?" exclaimed Ruth and Vivian at once.

"I do hope that he is," said Helen; "he is such a delightful man."

"Why mother," said Mr. Howe looking up suddenly, "what makes you look so concerned, don't you wish Mr. Parkinson to come?"

"Did I look concerned? I didn't know that I did. It is always a great pleasure to me to see Mr. Parkinson."

Thanks to the exclamations from the girls, no one except Mrs. Howe saw the look of absolute dismay on the faces of Sidney and Allan, which Gerald only failed to reproduce because he had more self control than the others.

"You don't suppose—" whispered Sidney to Allan.

"I don't think he could," was the fragmentary answer.

"Mr. Parkinson's letter," said Mr. Howe, "is of interest to you all; and if you like, I will read it aloud."

"Oh, do, yes do, we are all ready," from several voices, and Mr. Howe read:—

"My Dear Howe:—

"I have been very much interested indeed in what you have written me about The Beeches; but I still contend that you are not true to your colors. As anti-monopolist, you have no right to create such a corner at your homestead unless you change your title.

"But this is not what I began to write. You say

that the bread and coffee experiment is getting on very well; but that there has not been any universal enthusiasm over the dinner question. I agree with you perfectly that every young woman should know how cooking should be done and that it is impossible for her to acquire the necessary knowledge without some amount of experiment. I go further than this and say that she should know the elements of which our principal foods are composed, their construction and the combinations which are best suited to build up the brain muscle of a strong constitution. And further still, I believe that every young man makes a valuable addition to his equipment for successfully meeting the problems of life when he has learned to broil a beafsteak and make a cup of good coffee. By the way, that was rather clever of the boys who furnished the brown bread and beans for supper. I wish I could have been with you that day. But do you really think that Martha would have borne being cross-questioned on the subject? Her house is rather near by, is it not? Tell the young ladies, with my compliments, that I am getting together a collection of books and pamphlets on scientific cookery which I will send to The Beeches, but which, for various reasons, I cannot dispatch at once. Perhaps those who have not yet realized the importance of the subject may be interested in the scientific aspect of it.

"And now as to the real purpose of this letter. I wish— if you will allow me—to offer a prize for the best cooked and best served dinner of not more than six courses including coffee. I am personally much interested, as you know, in this subject, and besides, I consider it my duty to break up the monopoly at The Beeches.

"Remember me most cordially to my young friends. My regards to the ladies and best wishes to you in this new departure.

"Always Sincerely,
"HOWARD PARKINSON."

"Hasn't Mr. Parkinson invented some cooking apparatus?" asked Miss Howe.

"Yes," answered her brother; "but you and

mother are so conservative about such things I have never given you his pamphlets."

To Gerald Mr. Parkinson wrote—not using an official envelope and addressing with a typewriter. It read:

"MY DEAR GERALD:—

"I enclose one or two menus for the oven to give you an idea of what you can do with it. You can vary these very much, of course, according to the time of the year and the markets in different places. I do not know what is possible where you are at this season. As soon as I can I shall accept Mr. Howe's invitation to visit The Beeches, and I hope to find that you have done wonders with the machines. Let me know if I can do anything for you.

"Sincerely,
"HOWARD PARKINSON."

This letter Gerald read to Sidney and Allan by the big beach tree near the smoke house, and it was greeted with such shouts of laughter that Nelson came out from the stables to see what was going on.

"Isn't he a daisy?" said Allan.

"I hope he will come," said Sidney.

"What's this about?" asked Nelson, joining them.

Then the letter was read again for Nelson's benefit, for everything relating to the cave was of the greatest interest to him.

"But I don't see anything in that to laugh at," said Nelson, grave as a judge, an' the way you was agoin' on here made me wonder if

you'd found a ha-ha's nest with a te-te's egg in it."

"Why, you see," said Sidney, "Mr. Parkinson has written to Uncle Earle, and when he began to read the letter aloud, we boys thought that Mr. Parkinson was about to give us all away."

"I was just scared stiff," said Allan.

"But he didn't do it?" said Nelson much excited.

"Not a bit of it; he just enters into our little joke. You see Mr. Howe wrote him about the brown bread and beans, and he asks in this letter if Martha's house isn't rather near by. Oh, it's just too rich for anything."

"So," chuckled Nelson, "he's goin' to give the girls a prize, is he? Wal,I calkerlate there'll be some curus cookin' before they git through. What's the prize goin' to be? Some kind of a breastpin or trinket, I reckon."

"Very likely. Say boys, what do you say to my winning that prize?" asked Allan.

"Are you particularly pining for a breastpin?" inquired Sidney.

"No, but I should like to carry off the laurels and I believe I can if I put my mind to it; I've the greatest mind to try."

"What would you do with the prize?"

Why, present it, of course,to the girl who had done best, since that is the apparent object of

the giver. Wouldn't it be fun with the girls, snubbing us so about the cooking?"

"But suppose," said Nelson, "that the prize was some gimcrack that you'd like to keep, would you change your mind when ye got it?"

"What do you take me for, Nelson? I hope I'm a gentleman."

"I jest wanted to know,"was the answer.

"Here comes Tina in trouble," said Sidney. "What is it Tina?"

"Oh, Nelson," she exclaimed, the tears standing in her eyes, "that new stable boy took my horse when I came in and he kicked him;kicked him real hard, right in his stomach!"

What Nelson said we will not record, and Tina pretended not to hear. The boys sprang to their feet.

"Bring him out, Nelson," they said, "bring him out and we'll give him a dose."

"Not so fast, not so fast," replied Nelson, "he's allus been a good boy at home. Mebbe he don't know no better."

"Not know better than to kick a horse?" retorted Gerald savagely.

"Wal now,you stand by the side of the stable near the winder, and I'll go in an' ask him." Tina went too.

"Cris," said Nelson in his usual tone, "did you kick Miss Tina's horse?"

"Yes," answered Cris, "I give 'im a good one."

"What for?"

"He wouldn't stand."

"Where did you kick him?"

A moment of silence followed in which Cris pointed to the exact spot.

"You didn't do right," said the older man.

"Wal now, Nelson," said Cris in an injured tone, "if you was goin' to kick a horse where would you kick him?"

The answer was so ludicrous to the boys that they started away for fear their laughter would annoy Nelson; but Tina was so indignant that Sidney turned to walk back with her to the house.

"So stupid," she said.

"Not so stupid as ignorant, perhaps," replied Sidney.

"Yes," said Allan, who had joined them, "no doubt it is a part of his family creed that a horse must be kicked; but Nelson will soon 'eddicate' him; it won't happen again, Tina."

"I should hope not."

"After all," said Sidney, "it isn't much worse than a lot of men and women drive a horse; just notice how they yank 'em about."

"Yank 'em," repeated Allan; "where have I heard that classic expression? I do bethink me now"—putting his hand in his pocket—"Gerald come back," he called, "I have a bit of translation here from the Chinese which I wish to read to you."

"Don't Al, don't," begged Sidney.

"Yes, let me. It will be soothing to Tina's feelings to know there is something worse than the kick. And here comes Vivian; so much the better."

"Why Tina," exclaimed Vivian, "did you go without me?"

"I waited till I thought you would not come."

"And you went by yourself?"

"Yes, it isn't far."

"Look out, boys," said Sidney; "Tina looks as if she had begun to dig down for her oven."

"Yes, look out," said Tina.

"Have you been searching for mine?" asked Allan.

"That isn't a fair question," interrupted Vivian.

"I think it is fair, and what is more I believe that I have almost found it."

"Oh, Tina, you don't know how you have yanked my feelings, and you mustn't do it. Wait till I read you this," and Allan, mounting a cart that stood at one side of the drive, declaimed Sidney's verses which he had clipped from a newspaper:

"Full flush of foliage on each tree,
A honeyed breath to tempt the bee,
A cloud-land glorious to see,
Grand world; but oh! it's thralldom.

A wee maid wails her dolly torn,
A game cut short the small boys mourn,
By jerkings rough brute mouths are worn:
A warning word were welcome.

With brush in rest a bootblack stands,
Strong picture for an artist's hands;
He listens the absurd commands,
Rash threats which end all freedom.

Upon his brow sits wisdom sage,
The varied woes he's quick to guage,
His words should fill the widest page,—
'Ye didn't ought ter yank 'em.'

Oh! drop, my boy, your homely kit,
Preach far and wide where masters sit;
To flesh and nerve the lesson fit,
'Ye didn't ought ter yank 'em.' "

"Good!" cried Vivian, clapping her hands.

"Why, Sid," said Gerald, "I didn't know you were rushing into print without asking the advice of your friends. Allan must look to his laurels."

"Thank you," said Tina; "that quite expresses my feelings."

"And it was your woe that brought it out; so you see if you haven't found an oven you have discovered a poet."

"Did you really find anything, Tina?" asked Vivian in a low tone, as they walked on.

"Not really; but come with me and I'll tell you about it."

CHAPTER XII.

VIVIAN'S COUNTERPLOT.

"Now tell me, Tina," said Vivian eagerly when they had reached her room, "what did you find?"

"I heard the boys the other day," answered Tina, "talking about their cave; and you know they said there was a cave on the way to Castle Silent, so I went to see if I could find it. I tied Douglass to a tree and walked in till I found it."

"Was it far?"

"No, quite near the road."

"But you couldn't go in by yourself."

"That is why I wanted you to go and look with me."

"And do you think the cave is really it?"

"I don't know; it might be large enough for their oven. There's a stone in front and it looks as if the branches had been broken down all around it."

"Well, I'll go with you to-morrow; now we must go down stairs."

"You see," said Mr. Howe that evening, "Mr. Parkinson has stolen my thunder. I in-

tended to offer that prize for the dinner myself; but I can get even with him yet."

"How, Uncle Earle?" asked Ruth.

"By offering another prize."

"Now that will be riches," said Allan; "what shall I do if I win them both?"

"Perhaps you may win this one," answered Mr. Howe. "I am sure I hope you will try."

"I hope that it is within my reach," said Vivian.

"Scarcely. Of course you boys," turning to Allan, "are joking about the dinner; but here is something that you can do."

"Oh, please let us try too," pleaded Tina.

Mr. Howe smiled indulgently upon the girls as he said:

"I offer a prize to the one who at the end of the season shall show me the best groomed horse and the best kept saddle and riding accoutrements."

"What a jolly idea," said Sidney; "let's have a horse show."

"To this must be added the best management of a horse."

"You mean skill in riding?"

"In a way, yes; but a rider may show skill and be very showy without managing a horse in the best manner. By management, I mean, in addition to skill, having such sympathy with your horse that you know instinctively what to do."

"I shall begin to study horse language immediately," said Vivian.

The next morning, greately excited, she called the other girls into the morning room on their way to breakfast.

"What is it, Vivian? What new wrinkle have you in your brain now?" asked Helen.

"Did you hear what Mr. Howe said?"

"About what?"

"About the prizes."

"Yes, we all heard."

"Well, do you know, I am going to win that prize."

"You can't; it's for the boys."

"I know he thinks so; but he didn't say boys."

"But that doesn't make any difference."

"Yes it does. He said the one who did best, and I am determined to be that one."

"Will you come to breakfast, young ladies?" said Hannah at the door.

"Only five minutes allowed for difference in watches," said Allan teasingly.

"We're not late," replied Vivian. "We stopped only a minute in the morning room."

"It is ten minutes after eight," said Mr. Howe; "but I imagine the boys will forgive you if you tell them what new scheme you have on foot."

"I do not wish to lose one minute from horse

culture," said Allan, "otherwise it would not matter to me; I have so much to learn."

When they were in the stables, Mr. Howe carefully inspected each outfit. "I must be sure that everything is right in the beginning," he said, "and not hold you responsible for what is not your fault."

"Why don't the farmers have better looking horses, Mr. Howe?" asked Ernest.

"They haven't time to keep them looking like these, have they?" said Ruth.

"No, except now and then one."

Ralph listened with a slight sneer on his face. "I suppose you'll keep your horses groomed slick when you are a farmer, won't you?" he said.

"Maybe I shall be a farmer some day," answered Ernest, and then turned to speak to Mr. Howe; but that gentleman had moved on and, apparently, had not heard Ralph's remark.

"I wish that Ralph wouldn't snub Ernest so often," said Miss Howe, as she walked back with her brother to the house.

"Ralph is jealous," said his uncle, "and that makes him unreasonable. His mother, you know, takes for granted that I will do everything for him, and she has, unfortunately, let Ralph think so too. It is not good for any boy to be encouraged to take these things for granted. And then I suppose the horse has something to do with it."

"What about the horse?"

"Ralph had his choice before Ernest and thought he had taken the best one. Ernest, who chose at random, took the horse which Ralph wants now and he almost asked me to change; but I pretended not to understand."

"Why that is mean; as mean as can be."

"I cannot quite make Ralph out yet. I would like to believe that these unpleasant traits are the result of a false home education; but I do not know how much is inherent. I wish that some real test would come right now, this summer. As his guardian I might then know better how to deal with him. I believe that he is all right at bottom, and it will be a grievous disappointment to me if I find that he is not."

CHAPTER XIII.

RALPH.

Mr. Grafton had been very proud of Ralph in school and took the greatest pleasure in helping him with his studies. Ralph was not conditioned in anything; it was only that he wished to be absolutely sure of himself that he did some work each day. The other boys were so much brighter and quicker that they did not feel the need of grinding; but Grafton, who was a good deal of a grind himself, approved of Ralph's methods.

Some days when Allan felt like applying himself in earnest he would say to Sidney,—"Come along, I'm going to read with Ralph."

And Sidney would answer:—"All right; but excuse me, I always get riled when I try to work with him."

Yet a stranger at The Beeches, unless more than usually observant, would not have noticed anything amiss between the cousins. There was so much general occupation—discussion of daily news and events of interest, comparison of views about the new books which kept arriving at The Beeches, riding and fishing excursions,

where each one felt himself a part of the whole crowd, that outwardly it was an entirely harmonious gathering.

Then Mrs. Howe had a wonderful gift of interesting all, whether younger or older, who came under her influence. The social qualities which had made her such a charming entertainer in her earlier life were now brought into play for this smaller circle. The gracious dignity of her presence created an atmosphere in which the graces and refinements of life grew naturally without the aid of braces and leading strings.

Ralph, who was too proud to speak after the first few days af Allan's desertion, as he considered it, devoted himself largely to Mr. Grafton and accepted his grandmother's overtures toward a better acquaintance. After a time he lost the awkwardness with which he at first placed a chair or opened a door for her and there were times when he would inquire if he could be of service.

At home his mother always found him the best seat for reading, often giving up her favorite chair, and she always opened or closed doors or windows with a careful forethought for the comfort of the student. This was her idea of unselfishness and had its beautiful side; but at The Beeches Ralph found that he was not the sole and only individual to be considered.

Never having realized what his mother did for him, he brooded in silence over what he did not understand, each day adding more to the bitterness of his spirit.

"I won't go to-day," he said one morning as he came out of the grove where he had been aimlessly walking, "I'm tired of it all."

"They say they are to have the best drive of the season to-day," said Ernest, who was in the drive and heard the petulant remark.

"I don't care, I'm not going," said Ralph, too vexed to think that Ernest had overheard him to be willing to ask any further questions.

"I am sorry I cannot go," continued Ernest; "but Mr. Howe arranged for me to visit a fruit farm to-day and I can't do both. Mr. Howe didn't know the farmer was coming before to-morrow and he says I may give it up; but I don't think I ought to."

"Oh, I guess you would rather go to the farm," retorted Ralph.

"Are you coming to see them start?" asked Ernest timidly; "I am, and then we go."

"No," was the curt reply, as Ralph turned back into the grove from which he could see the mountain wagon and the out riders as they went merrily along.

When they were well out of sight, he went back to the stables where six of the saddle horses had been left for the day.

"Ernest won't be home," he said to himself, "and I'll take his horse out. I wish I had known more when I chose mine."

A slight prick of conscience was followed by the words: "It isn't his anyway and I've a right to take it if I like. Who's that with Nelson, I wonder."

"Pretty peart lot, ain't they?" the stranger was saying as Ralph came up.

"Of course," said Nelson, "Mr. Howe wouldn't have anything else."

The newcomer was a young man of about twenty, short, spare and slightly stooping from the shoulders, as one who had bent forward continually in some occupation. He had a close knit frame and keen black eyes that had a habit of closing partially as if focused on some point of interest.

"This 'ere is a handsome one," said Nelson, pointing out Bay Beauty.

"Handsome, yes; but what's she good fur?"

"Good for? Why good to ride of course."

"Pshaw! Now there's a beast I'd bet on if he was entered. D'ye think the old man'd let him go?"

"Go where?" asked Ralph, sauntering up with the air of a proprietor.

"To the races over to Topham. 'Tain't reg'lar, you know, but there's some rich sports over to the hotel thought they'd hev some fun.

Kinder tired o' hangin' 'round the girls and foolin' with tennis.

"'Tain't reg'lar, as I say, and the horses won't be trained nor nothin'. There ain't no reg'lar track, neither; but down here three miles or so there's an old driving park."

"Ye don't mean where them fools hed the stock farm and failed, do ye?" said Nelson.

"Thet's it. Bully place for a track; but it took a pile o' fixin'. When them fellers' govenors gits back from Europe guess they'll think they might better hev took 'em along. Left 'em up here to save money; serves 'em right, I say. They fixed the track and then they sent fur me to come up and ride. I told 'em I couldn't afford to come; but they said, money be hanged, I could set my own price. But we've got to hev an outside horse or two more than we've got yet and I'm lookin' fur somebody thet'd be pleased to go in. They say the old man ain't much on races."

"Mr. Howe doesn't approve of races," said Nelson with dignity, and then, his natural instincts coming to assert themselves, he asked:—

"There mighty anxious, I s'pose, to git a good horse."

"Well, not so terrible anxious," said the jockey warily, as, resting on one foot, he tapped his boot with the end of his riding whip, but if

you ken manage it," this with a wink on Nelson's side and away from Ralph, "I ken make it worth while fur ye."

At the suggestion of a bribe Nelson's indignation rose. "Worth while!" he exclaimed; "d'ye think you've come to some low kind of a stable where a man 'll fool his master for a few filthy dollars. You jest git out o' here mighty quick or I'll kick ye out."

With a conscious laugh the jockey turned toward the door. Totally misunderstanding Nelson and only thinking that he did not wish to betray himself before Ralph, he paused an instant as if considering, and then with another wink, disappeared.

Nelson, shaking his fist, went into the harness room and slammed the door. Ernest sat by the window with a book, waiting.

"Oh!" said Nelson, "you here?"

"Yes, it's getting late; I am afraid we'll miss the train if he doesn't come soon."

"Wal now that's too bad," said Nelson, "and all the rest gone off fur the day excepting Ralph."

"What is too bad, Nelson?"

"Why that fool jockey that wus here jest now said they had broke down somewheres, and there wasn't any train this morning. That farmer won't come fur you, I reckon."

For a minute Ernest looked crestfallen; then

he brightened up and said: "Never mind, I'll go to the house and read awhile and this afternoon I'll ride."

Ralph, who did not see or hear Ernest, stood looking at the horses. Nelson came out, harnessed up a market-wagon and drove away. After this Ralph deliberately saddled Ernest's horse and rode off.

He had gone but a short distance when he saw the jockey sitting in an expectant attitude by the side of the road. His cap was pushed back and his bridle rein was held loosely over his wrist.

"Mebbe I treed the wrong coon," he said to himself, "I'll try the young one now;" but he did not have to speak first.

"I say," began Ralph, "you know a lot about horses, don't you?"

"Born with 'em, raised with 'em, lived with 'em all my life."

"And you picked out this horse to be the best one in the stable, didn't you?"

"Well, I didn't examine 'em all with regards to all of their points," said the jockey with an air of profound wisdom; "but I do say, for the track, this one's the pick."

Ralph was much impressed. "I can learn a good deal from this chap," he said to himself; "but I must talk to him a little about his own affairs."

"When will your race come off?" he asked.

"To-morrow, if it's fair, and I reckon it will be." He remounted as he spoke and added carelessly: "If you're jest out for pleasure you might ride along. 'Tain't more'n three miles and you could see the track."

"I'd like to compare this horse with some of the others," said Ralph, who began to feel very wise as to horses in general and trotters in particular.

"All right, come ahead," said the jockey, who felt that he had reached a point where he could indulge in a little more familiarity, "and look here, if you don't mind backing this one, I could show you a thing or two about yours."

Ralph dismounted and the change was made. After this the jockey was so taken up with the horse that conversation lagged until they reached the driving park.

"Hello!" shouted one of two young men who came out to meet them. "What have you got there, Dan, and what chump is that on my horse?"

"This is my friend, Mr.—Mr.—"

"Wayne," added Ralph.

"My friend, Mr. Wayne; he has come down to show you his horse."

"Beg your pardon, Mr. Wayne. Here's to our better acquaintance," and he drew out a pocket flask, filling its little glass with a hand that shook slightly as he did so.

"Thank you," said Ralph, "it's a little too early in the day for me."

"No offense, no offense," answered the other, tossing it off himself. "Here, Topham—friend —Mr. Swayne."

Why Ralph had answered as he did, he could not have told. The truth was that he had not the courage to tell that he was under bonds to his Uncle Earle not to drink until he was twenty-one, and he had once heard his uncle make the remark which he had gotten off so glibly; but that was to a man who was drinking too much at ten o'clock in the evening.

The young man called Topham came up gravely and shook hands with Ralph. If he had been drinking, he betrayed no sign of it, but entered at once into conversation.

"Did Dan tell you what we are going to do?"

"He told me something about it."

"You see we had to have some horses from outside or the betting wouldn't have amounted to much. There's more or less prejudice against Rob's horse."

At mention of the betting Ralph saw that he was in the wrong place; but there was a fascination in feeling more like a citizen of the world, and he had a right to do as he pleased anyway.

Topham was apparently not older than Ralph; but his friend, who was somewhat older, was

entirely under the influence of the clear headed junior and obeyed him like a child.

"Let's go on the track," he said. "I'll take your horse, Rob."

"Take him myself," answered that young man.

"No, I'll ride him and Dan can try the new one."

The time slipped away rapidly, for after a trial or two, another horse was brought out and there was a great deal of talking, Ralph thought to no purpose, between the times of going around the track.

"Now then," said Mr. Topham at last, "we'll go over to the hotel and have some lunch."

"It's getting late, I think," said Ralph.

"Oh, no, it is early and we are less than a mile from our hotel. Perhaps you wouldn't mind walking. Dan can rub your horse down while we are gone. I suppose you can bring him over early in the morning."

"I suppose so," answered Ralph, who felt that he must accomplish it somehow, now that he had gone so far.

At The Beeches luncheon had long been over when Ernest, who had been talking with Mrs. Howe, went out to saddle his horse for a ride. Nelson had not returned. None of the stable boys were to be seen. For a minute Ernest gazed at the empty stall and then went to see

if his saddle was in its place. Yes, it was there; but Ralph's, which should have hung next to it, was gone.

"Oh! I wish he hadn't," said Ernest. "He doesn't love a horse as I do."

It never occurred to him to take Ralph's horse; he simply wandered out into the woods, feeling as nearly miserable as he could on such a beautiful day—after having just finished Stevenson's "Kidnapped."

"Hark, there they come! But oh, dear! Ronald is lame. And he is coming so fast. Why doesn't he let him walk?"

Ralph, who felt that he was much later than he should have been, hurried up to the stables, jumped off, hung up his saddle, polished his bit and started for the house before Ernest reached Ronald's stall.

"Poor fellow, poor fellow, where have you been?" said Ernest, patting the heated neck. "And what is the matter with your leg? Maybe it's a stone; Nelson says to always be on the look out for a stone."

And sure enough it was a stone. A sharp piece of flint which must have hurt cruelly as Ralph clattered homeward. Ernest shut his teeth firmly and thought some hard things.

"Wait a minute, just a minute," he said and rushed to the tool chest. Coming back almost instantly with a horseman's knife he opened the

pick and skilfully extracted the stone. Then, bathing the frog carefully, he wrapped it up with some of Nelson's lotion which he said beat Pond's all hollow, and as he gave a final pat, while Ronald rubbed a grateful nose against his cheek, Nelson came into the stables.

CHAPTER XIV.

DIGGING FOR BAIT.

"Well, Nelson," said Mr. Howe, "what is the stable report this evening?"

Nelson carefully closed the study door, stood near it a moment listening and then seated himself opposite Mr. Howe.

"There's some mighty queer doings down there to-day," he said, "and I'm beat to find out about 'em."

"What kind of doings?" asked Mr. Howe quietly, for he was always coolest when there was trouble in the air.

"Wal, after you drove off there come along a jockey from over Topham way. He said some chaps over there was getting up a race; they'd put the track in order."

"What track?"

"Down to the old drivin' park."

"Yes, go on."

"An' they was looking around for a few more horses besides their own to enter. This jockey was a professional an' I reckon they'd got things all fixed for the betting, to sweep in the stakes themselves. He looked over the horses and

picked out Mr. Ernest's. Then he wanted to know if I thought you'd let the horse be entered. Mr. Ralph he come in and asked a question or two, and then the jockey was impertinent to me, an' I told him to go or I'd send 'im. And if you'll believe it—'' continued Nelson with a mysterious air, ''that horse come in some time this afternoon as near banged up as you ever see a horse.''

''Who brought him?''

''Thet's the curus part. I wasn't here, ye know, an' when I come in, there was Mr. Ernest a pettin' an' a fondlin' his horse and the beast a nosin' his face as much as to say 'Thank ye,' and the boy lookin' as if he'd like to cry if I wasn't there.''

''What did he say?''

''Why the fust thing he said was: Oh, Nelson! come here and tell me if I've done it right.' ''

''Done what right?''

''The hoss had come in with a sharp stone in his off hind foot thet had lamed him an' the boy had pulled out the flint an' done it up as slick as I could myself. Then it flashed over me thet he might hev fed the hoss, an' says I, 'I hope you haven't fed nor watered.' He'd a foundered him sure if he had, for the hoss hed been put through his paces, I ken tell ye; but how on airth thet jockey got hold of him beats me.''

''Are the other horses all right?''

"All right, every one of 'em."

"By the way, Nelson, where were the stable boys this afternoon?"

"Wal, I tell ye, Mr. Howe, I thought thet too to begin with; but every one of 'em proved an alibi. Ye see I had Peter with me. Jim hed gone to his mother's, an' I see him there when we come back, an' Brom he went home too, an' he wasn't due till supper time. He's come in all right."

"Very well, Nelson, tell me as nearly as possible what time the jockey was here, what time you left the stable, and what time you came back."

Mr. Howe turned to his desk, made a note of what Nelson had said, and then went to join the group on the piazza.

There was not much merriment that evening. The story of Roland's escapade had been graphically detailed by Sidney who had it from Nelson. The young people were naturally much excited, and Ernest was deluged with questions: —"When did he come in? Where had he been?"

"I don't know."

"But you saw him while he was panting and hot."

"Yes."

"Well, what do you think?"

"I don't know how it happened. I don't know where he had been. Please don't ask me

any more questions?'' Ernest got up and turned to the door where Mr. Howe stood looking very gravely at him.

Ralph was reading at a table near one of the windows which looked out upon the piazza and where he could hear all that was said. Ernest went in and took a chair on the opposite side of the table, where he pretended to read until the the party separated for the night.

"If Ernest knows, I don't see why he doesn't tell,'' said Vivian to Sidney.

"I don't know, I am sure,'' answered Sidney; "but that little chap's true blue every time.''

"Of course he is,'' said Vivian.

Allan said nothing. When Gerald asked his opinion, he simply shook his head and refused to talk about it. There was nothing to do but wait for future developments.

The next morning Mr. Howe was missing from the breakfast table, and had left word that he would not be home until evening. No plan had been made for the day.

"We are like a ship without a rudder,'' said Ruth.

"Then let us drift;'' but Vivian's alert look belied the suggestion.

"Yes,'' said Allan, "let each one do as he pleases to-day.''

"I'd like that too,'' added Tina.

During the day it was evident that several

private schemes were on foot. Not long after breakfast Tina and Vivian strolled away toward the stables and when they were in front of the smoke-house Tina came to a full stop. "You don't suppose, do you, that their old stove is in there," she said.

"Why, no, it couldn't be; that is a smoke-house."

"I heard somebody say when we first came that it wasn't used any more—maybe the boys have put a stove in it—I'm going to try the door. Isn't it pretty with the green vine over the red brick?" Tina put out her hand to try the latch when, "Oh! O-o-oh!" she cried, for the big black and yellow spider had come to the edge of his web and looked at her.

Vivian laughed until she cried. "I can't help it, Tina," she said, "I can't help it; you are so funny and the spider looks so wise."

"I wish I could make you afraid of a spider just for once so that you might know how it feels," exclaimed Tina.

"Never mind, dear," replied Vivian soothingly, "we've found out one thing; it isn't in there for they couldn't go in and out without breaking down that web. Come along, I think it is the cave in the woods; let's go and see."

"S-sh," said Allan inside of the smoke-house, let's make sure they have gone, Sid, and then we'll follow."

"You don't mind the walk, Vivian?" asked Tina.

"Walk? No, I love it."

When they had reached the spot Vivian said: "It's a pretty big stone, isn't it?"

"Yes, but we can move it if we try."

"Are you sure it is a cave?"

"It looks like it. See, here is the bed of a little stream that has dried up; and this looks as if the water might have poured through here and worn a cave; you know it does that way."

"And you heard the boys talking about this cave?"

"Yes."

"Well, then let's try it. 'One, two, both together', as the men say."

"No, this won't move it. I wish I understood the principles of mechanics. What we want is leverage; if we put a strong stick under this hollow perhaps we can pry it out."

"Where's a stick?"

"Here's a good one—just the very thing.Now then. There—there it goes."

The flat stone tumbled away and disclosed to view, not an aperture large enough for an entrance, but an irregular face of impenetrable rock.

"Walk right in and take luncheon with us," said Sidney, with a grave face, as he and Allan emerged from behind the trees, Allan shaking with suppressed laughter.

"Well, I don't care," said Vivian, "there should be a cave here."

"We will hollow one out for you immediately," said Allan; but the girls said they would not be made fun of and started homeward.

"I'll tell you," said Tina, "it must be near there and perhaps they set up that stone as a blind. Let's go again this afternoon."

"If we can, yes."

"I am glad," said Vivian as they started on their second quest, "that we have such an exciting occupation for to-day. There's the horse trouble and then I don't know what's come over Miriam. She's as pokey as she can be since that dinner of hers. Now I wouldn't care if I had failed sixty times."

"I would. My turn to try comes next week, and yours too, doesn't it?"

"Yes, but don't expect much from me. Ruth's dinner was splendid, wasn't it? And I imagine that Helen will do something quite as elegant."

"I hope the boys will keep up their luncheon dishes," said Tina, "wasn't that pan dowdy, as Allan called it, good?"

"Just delicious; hark!"

They were in the thickest part of the wood and not far from Castle Silent.

"I hear voices," said Vivian; "it's the boys."

"In that direction?" asked Tina, pointing.

"No, more over there. I wish these sticks wouldn't crack so."

As lightly as possible they tripped along, Guard gravely following until they came to the edge of the ravine east of Castle Silent.

"We'll have to climb down here," said Tina, "and up on the other side."

"That's easy. Don't slip, but hold fast to the young trees."

When they had gained the further side they could see Castle Silent, dumb and deserted as ever, the timbers of the unfinished part growing more weather beaten as the season advanced. At one side of the half built-structure was a great pile of sand and broken stones, so sheltered that it had lain for years practically unchanged. In this pile of debris Sidney and Allan were digging.

"It is underneath after all," said Vivian, "Now we'll make them show it to us." Taking Tina's arm she walked up to the boys and, with a very good imitation of Sidney's tone of the morning, said:

"Thank you, young gentlemen, we shall be pleased to walk in and take luncheon."

"'Pon my honor, you deserve to be rewarded," said Allan; "walk right in and help yourself to some sand tarts and a granite pie."

"But there's nothing here after all. What are you two boys digging for, I'd like to know?"

"Digging for bait; we are to go fishing tomorrow."

"Trout fishing with sand flies?" said Tina.

All day a cloud had hung over The Beeches, but Mr. Howe dispelled it when he came home in the evening.

"If anyone has more pocket money than he knows what to do with," he said, "I can give him a legitimate object for expenditure."

"Of course we have lots of money," answered Vivian, "for even bonbons grow on The Beeches. We don't have a chance to spend a cent."

"I've had rather an interesting experience since I went away," continued Mr. Howe; "but I have had to sit in a stuffy room a part of the time. Come outside and I'll tell you."

When they were settled on the piazza Ralph and Ernest happened to sit where their faces were in the shadow, and Mr. Howe threw himself in a great arm chair with his back to them.

"They have been having a busy time over at Topham," he began; "two young men who have disgraced themselves by becoming gamblers and drunkards, got hold of the race track at the old driving park and meant to have a race there to-day. Mr. Graves, who owns the property, was at the seashore, but he was telegraphed for and wired back in time to put a stop to it. They had gotten together some very disreputable fellows and Graves would have felt it a personal disgrace if the thing had come off. He reached Topham late this afternoon and I left him full

of a fresh air scheme which some friend of his had proposed."

"I'll bet it was Uncle Earle who proposed it," said Sidney to Helen, who was near him.

"His scheme is to fit up the barn and the old training stables for dormitories—use the house for dining room and kitchens and bring up a lot of children from the city. They are to have the track for a play ground."

"Isn't it rather late to do that?" asked Miss Howe.

"No, August is no tquite over and all the indications are for a hot September. The fresh air people have done good work; but there are plenty of children yet who have not had an outing."

CHAPTER XV.

THE TOWER ROOM.

A few days later Sidney came in greatly excited. "I just met Mr. Graves, Uncle Earle," he said, "and what do you think he wants us to do?"

"I have no idea; what?"

"He is getting up a horse show at the old driving park and he asked me if we would come over with our horses."

"Oh, glorious!" exclaimed Vivian, "I was at the horse show last year in New York and it was the greatest fun."

"But could they go here?" asked Mrs. Howe doubtfully.

"On account of the tone? Anything that Mr. Graves manages will be well done, and if he let's his own daughters take part you may be sure that all objectionable elements will be kept out."

"He told me that his daughters and their friends were helping to get it up," said Sidney. "The proceeds are to be used for enlarging the house and making it a permanent fresh air building. He said they were puzzling over the

problem of how to put the tickets high enough for the few wealthy people who had not yet gone back to their city homes and yet have them low enough for the farmers who might like to come and whom he hoped would take an interest in the prizes."

"Why not have some boxes at a premium!" suggested Gerald.

"Yes, to be sure," said Sidney.

"Couldn't we go over and offer to help fix them up?" asked Allan. "Could we have the flags, Mr. Howe, and all that bunting we used on the Fourth of July?"

"And evergreens," added Ruth. "Oh, it would be lovely!"

"I believe we could make as good a showing as anybody," said Helen.

"Better," said Tina, "think of our horses."

"Yes," added Miriam, "and think of all the lessons we have had and the practice."

"I wish we might do something special here for the fund," said Ruth.

"Why not give a musical?" Miss Howe looked up brightly.

"Yes, if you would do all the playing."

"Not at all. I will do my part; but you play well, so does Vivian, and Allan has such a good voice. Then I am sure that Gerald would give us some violin solos."

"Can you endure the amateur violin at a concert?" asked Gerald.

"I certainly can endure your playing," she said, "and then there will be the two weeks to practice."

"But my dear Miss Howe," protested Vivian, "the house will be turned into pandemonium if I practice. When I do begin I simply bang away for hours every day."

"You shall practice in my study in the tower," answered Miss Howe, "that room was arranged so that I could practice all I pleased."

"In the tower? In your room in the tower?"

"Yes."

"Oh, Miss Howe! I know that it proves that I have a great deal of vulgar curiosity; but I have been just dying to go into that room. I've wanted to go into it almost as much as I've wished to see the ghost at Castle Silent."

Instantly Miss Howe's bright look changed, and picking up a letter which should have been put in the mail bag, she left the room.

"If I were you, Vivian, I wouldn't mention the ghost to Aunt Margaret, she doesn't seem to like it," said Sidney.

"I know; I forgot. Allan told me. I won't do it again."

The tower room was in the third story and had only a peaked air chamber above it. It was octagonal in shape and from its windows were to be seen most beautiful views of the surrounding country. But one who entered this room for

the first time would not be likely to look at once from the windows. There were many interesting things to arrest and detain the eye, from the pictures on the walls to the trifles scattered about above book-shelves and on tables. At first sight it had the air of a study belonging to a member of the opposite sex, yet it was not lacking in the feminine touches which every novelist finds in my lady's boudoir. When Vivian was permitted to enter she expressed the greatest delight.

"Oh! Miss Howe," she exclaimed, "this is what I like. You haven't a sign of a ruffle on any of the divan pillows, and you have a bronze inkstand instead of a blue and white china one."

Miss Howe's face flushed as she put an arm around Vivian's waist and, drawing her near, kissed her cheek.

"You are like me in a great many ways," she said; "and perhaps that is the reason why I am so fond of you."

"Are you fond of me, Miss Howe? I didn't dare to think so; do you know I've been just a little bit afraid of you until now."

"No, don't be afraid of me," said Miss Howe. "You are so like me that I fear you may do some of the very things in your life which I regret in mine; but you are a wilful lassie and I am afraid only your own experience will teach you."

"I suppose I am self-willed," answered Viv-

ian, looking up at Miss Howe, who was smiling in spite of her grave words; "but if my doings would lead me to the possession of such a room as this, I shouldn't mind anything else. But I should want a few oil paintings; why do you have so many etchings and engravings?"

"One reason is because I like so much color in other things. I like to have my Moorish hangings and those red Indian bowls and my Venetian glass and the rest of it."

"Yet here is a painting," said Vivian.

"Yes, I could not spare my Mount Ætna, with those beautiful hillsides, and you see I have given the alcove panel entirely to it. The frame is so old that the gold harmonizes with the books below instead of putting them out of countenance, I think."

"Such delightfully low book shelves. Oh! the whole thing is ideal; now if you will only play for me, I will almost promise to be good all the days of my life."

"I will play for a little while and then we would better call Gerald and Allan to make out a programme for the musical."

Gerald preferred a severely classical programme; but Allan had a different idea.

"We tried that last summer on the mountains," he said, "and some of the audience whom we wished to please didn't enjoy it one bit. I heard one farmer say to his wife: 'Say Ma, I

s'pose that's mighty fine, but can you hear any tune to it?' "

"If Vivian would sing some of the old ballads, that would give pleasure."

"I sing, Miss Howe! Why, you know I can't sing any more than a mouse, except in choruses, then I can."

"Suppose we try now; take Bonnie Dundee."

"That's a howling success," was Allan's comment when she had finished.

"It must be the room," answered Vivian, "I never sang so well before. Now it is Allan's turn."

"The programme is still too classic for me," said Allan. "Would it shock you too much if I proposed some negro melodies?"

"The very thing," said Vivian.

"You would need a banjo," suggested Gerald.

"Very well; I could get one in time."

"Couldn't you give us something original in the way of a song?" asked Vivian.

"Don't ask more than the ordinay mortal is equal to," was the answer.

"We will give you *carte blanche*," said Miss Howe, "to fill in dull places."

The tower room was now the centre of interest for the musical ones, and preparations for the musical, as well as for the horse show, progressed each day. Vivian, who was attempting some difficult Beethoven, spent much time at the

piano and liked to practice late in the afternoon when Miss Howe was apt to be occupied elsewhere. If an excursion or company interfered with this she would ask to be allowed to go up for an hour after dinner. When she had closed the piano, and put out the lamp, depending upon a candle to make her way down to the next floor, she liked to stand at the window, through which she could see Castle Silent and dream fantastic things about it and the ghost. One evening, standing in this way, she fancied that she saw lights in the windows. "Not lights, but a ghostly glare," as she described it to Gerald later.

"I wish I had been with you," said Gerald, "I could easily have shown you that it was the moonlight shining on the outside."

"But," answered Vivian, "the moon had not risen."

CHAPTER XVI.

NELSON'S RETURN.

"Life isn't half so spicy since Nelson has been away," said Sidney one morning when they were in the stables grooming the horses.

"Why did he go now?" asked Ruth.

"I rather urged it than otherwise," said Mr. Howe, "for Nelson is so like a clock I feared he might not get straightened out again if he changed his plans. For many years he has gone just at this season to see his sister. He makes a visit of ten days and comes home on Thursday afternoon; if he should stay until Friday I should think something terrible had happened."

"Then he is due to-day," said Sidney.

"Yes, and I should be glad if you boys would have everything in particularly good shape. If you can win Nelson's praise you will know that you have done work to deserve it."

Ralph heard all this with a downcast face, as he finished in a perfunctory manner the grooming of his own horse. He was very strong—work was nothing to him—yet the process seemed long this morning. The horse stood quietly until his master had finished and then gave his

head a little shake as much as to say: "Well, I'm glad that's over." Ernest's horse, on the contrary, never failed to show his appreciation of his young master's attentions and always looked after him as he left the stall. Then the boy would go back, smooth the glossy mane, pat the pretty head, and, if no one was looking, kiss the white star in Ronald's forehead.

Nobody knew, unless Mr. Howe suspected, what a comfort this dumb companion was to the boy. He could not speak to a person about the trouble that was spoiling his good time and he could not go home without distressing his mother; there was nothing to do but bear it until the end.

"If only Ralph wouldn't hate me so," he said to himself, "I wouldn't mind so much. I should think he would be glad I didn't tell; but he isn't. I'm glad that Ronald's foot is all right though; but I wonder, oh! I do wonder if Mr. Howe thinks I did it. And Mrs. Howe and all —they're just as nice to me as they can be; but maybe they do think so. They're so fond of Ralph I couldn't tell if I wanted to, because they've been so good to me."

Ralph would not question himself too closely. When he found his thoughts getting too much for him he would do some hard reading or insist that Allan should listen to some grand money-making scheme for the future, or he would some-

times even join in the preparations for the horse show.

Allan did his best; but there were silent pauses instead of the old quick repartee, and one day when they had been talking, Ralph stayed at home in a moody frame of mind instead of going to the driving park with the others as he had intended.

"It isn't really Ernest's horse," he said for the hundredth time to himself, as he walked to the house, where he found his grandmother sitting on the piazza.

"Why, Ralph," she said surprised, "you didn't go with the others."

"No," was the curt answer.

"They will get ahead of you, will they not?"

"I don't much care if they do."

"I know you care more about your books; but I think, my dear"—nobody called Ralph "my dear" except Mrs. Howe—"that you may be neglecting to take the proper amount of exercise."

"Oh! I don't think that will make any difference."

"That is because you are so strong; but we often see the strongest constitutions break down too early in life, where they have been overtaxed."

"I think I do get a good deal of fresh air and exercise; you know I walk a good deal."

"I know you do, and yet I feel that you miss

some of the pleasures which the others have," said Mrs. Howe. Then she continued: "But I wish they all had your perseverance."

It was the first time for many days that anything like praise had fallen on Ralph's ears from anyone except Mr. Grafton, and he was so used to his tutor's commendation, that it did not especially count. The tone too, was sympathetic and for an instant Ralph's better self was in the ascendant, as he thought:

"If I could only tell her about it—I wish I knew what she would say."

At that moment a carriage drove up with visitors for Mrs. Howe, and Ralph retreated with a sense of relief at not having spoken. He turned again into the woodland path—walked a short distance—and then, throwing himself down under the trees, gave free range to the unreasonable thoughts which chased through his brain.

"It's been so ever since the beginning. Sidney had no business to ask Uncle Earle if Ernest might come up here; that's what has made all the trouble. And then Gerald makes himself a leader when he is only a guest. If he wasn't here Allan wouldn't be so taken up as he is all of the time. And Aunt Margaret makes such a fuss over Gerald, you'd think he was a great deal better than the rest of us. I wish I hadn't come. I wish—I wish—nobody cares whether I'm here or in the Red Sea. I can't go

to the park much—I'm sick of it all since I took Ernest's horse over—I wouldn't have anything to do with their ridiculous cookery, even if they asked me; but I do wish I could find out what it is that Sid and Allan are after when they go out nights. Gerald isn't in that, for I've watched them. It's some fun or other—something they expect to find—and Allan ought to have asked me instead of Sidney. It's a blamed shame, I say; but I don't care any more for them than they do for me.''

So he tried to comfort himself but failed. Before this all had gone well enough in his life; but since he had come this year to The Beeches new feelings and desires had sprung up in his heart. Up to this time he had not felt the need of any companions beyond the few whom he had chosen for himself; now he wished to be included in all that was going on and he felt hurt because no one had urged him to go to the park. He realized that his attempts to join in the general gayety had been awkward and he was conscious that his feeling about Ronald was the cause; but he felt that if he had a chance to explain to Allan he could make him see it all right. The girls, who had been very nice at first, he felt only tolerated him, and altogether life was becoming very hard, when—soft as the flutter of tiny wings— came the thought of his grandmother's words: "My dear, I wish they all

had your perseverance." Then he roused himself. It was not so much what she had said as the way she had said it which touched him, and he determined that she at least should be proud of him.

"I don't care what they think," he said, "and I'll go in now to finish those problems before dinner time."

No one was left at the stables; the dogs were on guard. Mr. Grafton, who had important letters to answer, had remained at home to be on hand in case of any emergency, but the others with the stable boys to help were all at the park. As Ralph drew nearer he thought he heard a groan. He stopped to listen—not being able to distinguish at first from which direction it came—then he heard it again distinctly, and this time Nelson's voice.

"Oh! I wish I had a drink of water." Ralph knew now that Nelson was in his room over the carriage house; there was cool water at hand and a drinking cup on a nail near the stair. He filled the cup and mounting the stairs pushed open the door.

"What's the matter, Nelson? Here is water," he said.

"Go away, go away—you mus'n't come in," said Nelson, at the same time stretching out an eager hand for the water. "Go away," he repeated, "you mus'n't stay here."

"But I'm not going away till you tell me what to do for you."

"Why, I've been to my sister's"—Nelson spoke slowly with many pauses—"they've got typhus fever there—I come back fur some things an' to say I had to go an' take care of my sister —I got here this afternoon jest as I promised I would—my head felt queer an' I lay down a minute. I reckon I must have gone to sleep fur I meant to get one o' the boys to go fur the doctor for I've got the fever sure; but I d' know as I could make 'em hear an' they'd be scared to death anyway."

"I don't believe it's typhus fever," said Ralph, who wished to say something comforting and did not know what else to say. "Shall I go for the doctor now?"

"No, I feel better. You ken wait till mornin'. Then in the mornin', if you'll jest set suthin' to eat at the top of the stairs I reckon I ken git it. Now you go, an' I'm much obleeged to ye."

"I'm not going, Nelson, I'm going to stay here and take care of you."

Nelson stared; he was not too ill to feel amazed at the proposition. "Why, they'll all miss ye from their doin's; ye can't stay."

"No," answered Ralph, "they won't miss me much. I can be spared better than anyone else, and you must have a nurse you know," he said, ending the sentence cheerfully which had been begun in rather a bitter tone.

"See here, boy," said Nelson, "I reckon I've ruther misjedged you;" and then he turned over and fell into a heavy sleep.

Ralph had meant to insist upon going for the doctor but now he did not know quite what to do. Perhaps Nelson might waken and need him and—although he knew but little of illness, he had always heard that sleep was the best thing, so he decided to wait. Nelson was always very positive as to what he wanted and he might be offended if the doctor came without his permission.

Except for Nelson's heavy breathing it was very still in the room—a large airy place over the carriage house, fitted up in a severe but unique fashion to suit the occupant. There were no unusual sounds outside,only the twitter of the birds and the occasional sound of wheels as some one drove past.

"I wish I had a book," thought Ralph. "I'll go and get one."

He started up but paused, remembering what Nelson had said. "Typhus fever? What was it like? People didn't make much of a fuss over typhus fever—no, that was typhoid. Nelson spoke of this as if it were as bad as small-pox, and he said I mus'n't come near him. Why then,I suppose I must not go to the house. How long does this sort of thing last; three weeks, isn't it?"

Ralph looked about the room calculating the possible chances of discomfort during the time of his voluntary imprisonment. Then he looked at Nelson and for the first time in his life there awoke in his mind the desire to be of real actual service to a human being, outside of himself.

"I'll just stay here and take care of him," he said; "I believe I can do it." And then—with more peace of mind than he had known for many a day—he sat down by the window to wait for the return of the party so that he might feel free to go for the doctor if necessary.

A boy rode up to the house with a message; but Ralph did not pay much attention to him, nor did he know that word had been sent that the whole party had accepted Mr. Graves' invitation to take supper with him that evening. He heard Peter and Crist in the stables, yet thought best to wait for his uncle's return before going out.

Nelson wakened and asked for water. Ralph re-filled the cup and returned with it.

"Ye ain't a goin' to stay here, are ye?" asked Nelson.

"Of course I'm going to stay," Ralph scarcely recognized his own voice, it was so cheerful.

Nelson gave a sigh of satisfaction and turning over was soon in a sound sleep again. Ralph began to feel drowsy and at the same time hungry.

"There won't be much show for dinner for me to-night," he said, and then he remembered that when he had gone down for water he had seen a tin cracker box in the picnic wagon, left there after the last excursion. He slipped down stairs and was conscious of a faint hollow feeling as the idea flashed over him that the box might be empty. But no—crackers, a box of sardines and a package of sweet chocolate. No danger of his starving on that.

"It's queer they don't come," he said when he had finished. "I'll lie down here and take a nap until they do;" and hunting up a pair of blankets, one of which he rolled up for a pillow, he lay down on the floor and was soon in as sound a sleep as Nelson himself.

CHAPTER XVII.

HIS BETTER SELF.

In a confused sort of way Ralph realized that the party had returned; but he did not know that he was not in his own room in the house. He slept on and was only aroused by Nelson's voice in the early morning.

"I reckon," he said, "if you don't mind—if ye was goin'out on horseback anyway—ye might see whether the doctor would be comin' out in this direction to-day."

Ralph sprang up at once. "Yes," he said, "I'll go right off. Is there anything I can do for you before I go. It won't be long before I get back."

"No, unless a drink of water, and hand me that air blanket. Now you go." And in a few minutes Ralph had saddled his horse and galloped away to the village.

"I will come right out after breakfast," said the doctor, when he had heard Ralph's account; "but I do not believe there is any cause for alarm. If there were any typhus fever so near I should have heard of it." Then as a sudden thought struck him: "How do you happen to be taking care of Nelson?"

"Oh! it was an accident," and Ralph related briefly what had occurred.

"It was a plucky thing to do," said the doctor, "you would better come into the profession."

"I believe it wouldn't be half bad," said Ralph to himself as he hurried back to report to Nelson.

At the breakfast table Mrs. Howe asked: "Did Ralph join you last evening?"

"No," answered Mr. Howe; "wasn't he here?"

"He didn't come in to take dinner with me, so I supposed he had gone to you. I hope he is not ill. Hannah, go to Mr. Ralph's room and see," said Mrs. Howe.

No, he was not there, and then Ernest suggested that he might have gone for an early ride. "I'll go and find out," he said, jumping up and starting for the stables. In a moment or two he returned. "It's all right," he announced; "he will probably be here in a little while."

"Did Nelson report to you, mother, when he came home last night? I hope he had his usual good visit."

"He didn't get back last night."

"Not get back! Why, I'd as soon expect the moon to fall as Nelson to vary his plans."

"He could have telegraphed if he did not intend to come," said Miss Howe.

"Yes, he could," her brother replied; "but I doubt if Nelson would commit such an extrava-

gance. He is saving up money for his sister's children and he counts every penny that can be added to the hoard."

Sidney was the first to leave the table and go out to look after his horse; Ralph called to him from the window.

"What are you doing up there?" said Sidney; "why don't you come in to your breakfast?"

"I went for the doctor," answered Ralph. "Nelson says he has been exposed to a contagious fever and nobody must come near him."

"But you are there."

"I know; but that just happened so. I wish you would bring me some breakfast to the carriage house and I'll come down and get it."

"Breakfast for Nelson?"

"Yes, and for me too," and Ralph disappeared before Sidney could say anything more. Had it been Allan he would have called out any one of a dozen things by way of commendation; but with Ralph, somehow the words stuck in his throat. He was sorry, but he could not help it, so he did the next best thing by hastening to the house to report, and he found them all still chatting at the table.

Mrs. Howe was the first to speak when Sidney had finished. "Nelson has never been sick to my knowledge," she said; "I am inclined to think he has only taken cold now and is more frightened than ill." Still she looked anxious.

"The doctor will no doubt be here in a few minutes," said Mr. Howe, as he rose and watch in hand started toward the door. "I will wait for him outside." Then he turned back and scanning the grave faces, said:

"I trust this matter is not serious; but remember it is quite as brave for Ralph to be there as if it were as dangerous as he thinks it is."

"I know it," answered Sidney, "and that makes me wish I had said something to him before I came in."

"It was awfully plucky," said Gerald.

"I am afraid—" Allan's tone was regretful—"that I have neglected Ralph lately."

"I haven't wanted to work with him," added Sidney, "but the trouble is you never know what's in a man."

"Is it not, rather," Mrs. Howe questioned, "that we do not train ourselves to look beneath the surface?"

At this moment Hannah came from the pantry with a tray. "I will take it out," said Mr. Howe, "and I will let you know as soon as possible what the doctor says."

The doctor came promptly, and as soon as he drove away Sidney said:—"I will go out and arrange some signals with Ralph so that he can whistle if he needs anything."

"The doctor has been here," called Ralph as he saw him coming.

"Yes, I know; did he tell you what was the matter."

"He says there is no cause for alarm so far as he can see; but he will send to find out about the fever, and we shall know to-morrow morning."

"I hope that will end your quarantine."

"Thank you, it isn't bad; Nelson is very entertaining."

"I believe," said Miriam as the girls gathered at one end of the piazza, "that it is something dreadful after all."

"Grandmama does not think so," said Ruth.

"You can frighten yourself into a disease"—Vivian threw up her head as if defying an enemy—"I have heard my mother say so; don't let's any of us be afraid."

"Easier said than done," replied Helen.

"The doctor is going"—Tina stepped at once towards Mr. Howe and the rest followed to hear what he would say. Then, glad and relieved by his reassuring words they scattered to take up the varied occupations of the day.

Each one of his companions now wished to do something for Ralph; but it was Ernest who reached a pratical conclusion:—

"Mr. Howe—" he began timidly.

"Yes, Ernest."

"You know Ralph will lose his chance at the park if he has to stay up there and cannot

take his horse over with the others, and I wish—"

Ernest stopped short, for Mr. Howe's face was growing stern; but he gathered up his courage and went on:

"I wish he could ride Ronald; he likes him, and I could have him all ready."

"What horse would you ride?"

"Oh! it doesn't matter about me. I may tell Ralph, may I?"

"No," answered Mr. Howe shortly, as he turned away from the confused boy, who had forgotten that any suspicion had fallen upon him; but who now believed that to be the cause of Mr. Howe's apparent displeasure. "Did Mr. Howe really think he had lamed Ronald? And if he did, how could he be so good to him instead of sending him away?"

Nelson was wonderfully cheered by the doctor's opinion of his case and exerted himself to entertain Ralph with stories and reminiscences. Ralph was a good listener and Nelson grew more personal in his narrative. It was late in the afternoon—Ralph had just returned from a long walk.

"I've ben thinkin' since you've ben gone that I'm goin' to make my will."

"Why haven't you made it before, Nelson?"

"Why, there wa'n't no occasion. Ye see my sister she'd inherit from me, an' I've allus cal-

kerlated thet her two boys 'd inherit my savin's."

"Yes, that is right," answered Ralph; "when a man hasn't any children of course it goes to his sister's or brother's children;" and Ralph remembered that Uncle Earle was a bachelor and he a sister's son.

"Not allus by a long shot!"—Nelson raised up on his elbow and spoke in an excited tone—"Ye see I was down there an' them little chaps come up as peart as could be, with, 'How d'y do, uncle!' an' I was so tickled to see 'em an' see how much they'd growed sence I was there last year, an' I giv' 'em some little trinkets I'd bought an' they was dreadful pleased."

"One day there wus some o' their cronies waitin' fur them to come back from an errand they'd been sent on an' they didn't know I wus there. Says one on 'em says he:—'Hev ye seen the old man?'

"'Yes, I've seen him,' says the other one.

"'Wal, thet's their uncle,' says the fust one; 'he's awful rich, an' they're goin' to hev all his money.'

"'How do you know?'

"'Why, they told me so,' says he. 'Jakey, he says thet when he gits the money, he ain't a goin' on no errands any more, an' he's goin' to hev a gold watch with a chain thet'll go in both pockets.' An' this boy said thet Jakey asked

him if he thought such an old man would live very long.

"Now," continued Nelson, "of all low down, mean, contemptible hoggishness, thet beats all. Them little chaps—them little knee high to grasshoppers a waitin' fur dead men's shoes! But I've made up my mind. I'll make my will an' leave every derned cent to a hospital."

Stung to the quick, Ralph started up and went to the window.

"Yes," said Nelson; "bring me a drink; I want it bad."

"A waitin' for dead men's shoes." The words rang and rang through Ralph's brain. Even when night came he could not get rid of them; but tossed around while Nelson slept. If waiting for dead men's shoes developed such characters as Nelson described, what might not his dependence upon his uncle do for him. Looking upon things at The Beeches as in some sense his own had certainly wrought disaster.—"I didn't have any right to take that horse," he said at length. "As soon as I can get out of this I'll go and tell Uncle Earle everything, and I'll tell him that I'm going to be a doctor." Then he went to sleep.

In good time the next morning the doctor appeared and greeted Ralph with: "This ends it; you can go to the house to wash up and get your breakfast. That prig of a young doctor has

more imagination than his brains will balance; but I think he won't forget in a hurry what I've said to him. A mild form of typhoid is all that is the matter with his sister, and as for Nelson, it is only a cold and we shall have him about again in a day or two."

"That is what my grandmother thought; I am glad she was right."

"I am glad, too, for everybody's sake. Please ask Mrs. Howe if I may invite myself to breakfast. I didn't stop to get any."

The fact of the doctor being present made it easier for Ralph, as he was a talkative man, and it was a relief to the others, for with all their appreciation of what Ralph had done, they did not at once find words to express it.

Immediately after breakfast Mr. Howe went into his study. Ralph followed and stood near an open window while his uncle sat down as usual at his desk.

Without hesitation and with a modesty quite new to him, Ralph gave an account of what had happened on the day of Ronald's accident. Mr. Howe asked no questions—made no remark. He let the confession go on fully to the end, glancing now and then at the flushed face and wishing that Ralph would meet his eye squarely instead of part of the time looking out of the window and a part of the time at the bronze candlestick on the stand near him.

When the story was finished and he had managed to convey the thought that he had expected his uncle to do everything for him without any special exertion on his own part, he did turn and looking firmly into Mr. Howe's face, said:—

"I know you cannot overlook this, I do not expect you to; but you are my guardian and I want to ask your permission to let me begin as soon as possible to study for the medical profession. I am going to be a doctor."

Mr. Howe's face cleared as if by magic. "I congratulate you," he said, "I congratulate you. You have found your better self; your real self. But about the profession—we will consider that later. If you have the necessary qualifications for such a life there is nothing nobler to be desired.

"I must tell you," continued Mr. Howe, "that I have known the true state of affairs all along, for I went right over to Topham and looked up the whole matter. I didn't wish to speak, for I felt you would not let things go on much longer without clearing Ernest."

"Ernest!"

"Why yes, surely you saw that the blame must fall upon him; he was with the horse when Nelson came in and saw him."

"Really, Uncle Earle, I didn't know that you blamed him."

"I didn't blame him because I knew; but he thinks I did and he has been wonderfully brave about it. Then he was so sorry that you were cooped up with Nelson, he begged me to-day to let you ride Ronald at the horse show. He said he would have him in good shape and it didn't matter about his own riding."

"Oh! Uncle Earle, did Ernest do that?"

"Yes, I thought you would like to know. He is in his room now; I heard him say he was going there to write to his mother."

Ralph had given an involuntary start toward the door, and as soon as Mr. Howe finished speaking, he hurried away.

"Come in," called Ernest, as Ralph knocked at the door.

"I came to tell you," said Ralph, "that I rode your horse and lamed him."

"Oh! don't," said Ernest. "I know you did, I saw you come home; but it's all right—he isn't my horse anyway."

"I've just told Uncle Earle," Ralph went on, "and he says he's known it all the time; he saw the man out at Topham the next day."

"He did! Then he didn't think I did it!" and Ernest buried his face in his hands over his mother's letter as Ralph went out of the room.

CHAPTER XVIII.

MIRIAM'S SUCCESS.

Vivian was not the only one who aspired to win Mr. Howe's prize. One morning she was surprised by the question.

"Would you mind if I groomed my horse, too, Vivian?"

"What, you, Tina?"

"Yes, I know I am a little goose about most things, but I'm not one bit afraid of a horse."

"That is good," answered Vivian. "Horses know right away when you are afraid, and they respect you when you are not."

"Fred says," continued Tina, "that those who know nothing fear nothing; but I do know how it feels to be thrown from a horse, and I'd get right on again the next minute."

"That is very jolly. I am going to wear my short skirt in the stables; put yours on after breakfast and we'll go out together."

"Look out, boys," said Sidney as the two girls came to the table, "there's more mischief afoot."

"Yes, look out," said Tina, and she drew herself up until she looked quite tall.

"Hasn't Tina been growing?" asked Ralph,

glancing at her excited face; "it seems to me that when she came she was quite small?"

"I'll measure with Miriam after breakfast; she was way above me two months ago."

"But," said Sidney, "Miriam is not so tall as when she came."

"What an idea," said Miriam; "but I am glad if you think so. I was tired of being a bean pole."

"I think I never saw such a rapid change in any one before," said Mrs. Howe. "Tina is shooting up but Miriam is broadening out. It shows what a real out of door life will do in a short time."

"The others have not changed much," said Ralph.

"But," answered Ruth, "you must remember that we were not house plants."

After breakfast the test was made. It was found that Miriam had apparently remained the same height, while Tina had not only shot up but had lost some of the weight which Sidney had said made her such good ballast.

"There really is not so much difference between them now," said Mrs. Howe, and the fact that she could no longer be called a dumpling gave Tina a confident air which was pleasant to see.

As they went out to the stables Sidney said: "I have lost part of my fun; you don't tease worth a cent any more."

"It was you who cured me," answered Tina.

"You did tease me; but it wasn't a hateful tease and now I don't care at all."

Sidney threw her an approving glance and said to himself as he did so: "She is growing pretty like the other girls."

At this moment Vivian joined them, dressed in her mountain gown. "Oh," said Tina, "I must go back and change."

"Is there a mountain party to-day?" asked Sidney; and then when Vivian had explained—"Really, Mr. Howe might claim to be a magician; think what his plan of life at The Beeches has done for Tina."

Douglass seemed quite complimented to have Tina groom him. Peter was ready to answer all of her questions and all went flourishingly in that quarter.

"Now, Vivian," said Gerald, "bring the sugar for Fulano and then try your hand on him."

"Wait till I give one more touch to Bay Beauty's coat. Doesn't it shine?"

"Yes, she has the handsomest coat of any horse in the stables."

"You mean, then, that it is easier to make her look well."

"I do; but you cannot help that. She is a beauty every way; such a fine head, and that breadth of chest is simply magnificent. Then she is the finest limbed horse of all except Fulano."

"I am growing so fond of her," said Vivian, "and I think she likes me." Vivian drew the pretty head down on her shoulder and played with the beautiful mane.

"Aren't you going to bring the sugar?"

"Yes, for I want him to get used to me so that I can ride him; but I just love Bay Beauty," and with a final pat she came out of the stall.

Don was quite as docile as could have been desired while Vivian pretended to finish a toilet which was already complete. Presently Gerald said:

"I was not sure that he was used to a habit, so I tried him this morning before breakfast and I am sure he is safe. Would you like to get on him now?"

"Oh, do you think I may?"

"Yes, Mr. Howe has given permission, and although Grafton hesitated I talked him over. But you must let me lead him around the drive, and I think that is all we can do this morning."

"Very well; then when I have ridden Fulano I am going to see the ghost."

"But you promised."

"I promised not to try to see the ghost until I had ridden Fulano."

"How are you going to do it?"

"If I tell I am afraid I shall lose my chance of accomplishing it."

"I do not like you to try," said Gerald, deter-

mining to keep a close watch and prevent if possible any act which she might afterward regret.

Vivian was greatly excited as she mounted the spirited black horse, but the excitement was all confined to herself. The horse was perfectly quiet and nothing happened after all.

"There, Nelson," she said as she dismounted, "my neck isn't broken yet."

"'Taint no fault o' yourn, Miss Vivian. I wish ye wouldn't take too many chances for I feel it in my bones thet suthin' is goin' to happen."

"Do you suppose he heard you, Gerald, trying to persuade me to give up my pet project?"

"No, Nelson says every few days that 'if suthin' don't happen it'll be contrary to natur, thet's all.' "

The tone was so exactly like Nelson's that Vivian laughed merrily as they followed the others, who had already started for the house.

The evening of that day was the one set for Helen's dinner, and as they left the dining-room Sidney said:

"I do not think there is much doubt now about the Parkinson prize."

"I should think not," assented Gerald "Helen has simply surpassed herself."

"I am sure I did well," said Vivian.

"Yes, but how?"

"By copying Ruth as nearly as I could," laughed Vivian.

"I should think the only fun would be in trying to exercise one's originality," said Gerald.

"Tina is always original," added Allan, "for nobody approaches her coffee."

"I am sure her dinner was good too,"—Ernest did not feel that praise of the coffee was enough.

"Of course it was," said Ruth.

"And now," said Allan, "I have all my points and it is to be a dead walk over. I shall sail away with the Parkinson prize right under your very noses. I'll give such a dinner as none of you ever saw before."

"Yes, I can imagine it," and there was just a shade of scorn in Vivian's voice.

"Don't be so sure," said Sidney, "there's one election district that hasn't been heard from yet."

"What? Who?"

"Why Miriam hasn't tried this time—her first dinner didn't count."

"Oh! don't speak to Miriam," cautioned Ruth, "she has been so sensitive since that fiasco."

"You don't think she will try?"

"Oh! no, I am sure she won't."

While this conversation was going on, Miriam was with Mrs. Howe in her room. "I have a confession to make," she said, seating herself on a low stool at the older lady's feet.

"Are you quite sure that you wish to make it to me?" asked Mrs. Howe.

"I should like very much to tell you if I may?"

Mrs. Howe rested a hand lightly on Miriam's shoulder, and the young girl began:—

"Some time ago they all wanted me to go to Deerfoot for the morning; but I didn't feel like it and I stayed behind to read. You thought we were all away and didn't see me on the divan behind the curtain. I came in from the side door as Ernest went out to join the others. I didn't mean to listen and I didn't pay any attention to what was said until I heard my name. Then I should have gone away; but somehow I couldn't. I was so angry with Mr. Howe—so wickedly angry—I meant to go right in and speak to him and then pack my trunks and go home. But you were so kind and said such sweet things I didn't. I went to my room and threw myself down on my bed and cried and cried. Then it came before me just like a picture—like a panorama—what I had done and what I was like."

"You must not be unjust to yourself," said Mrs. Howe.

"Do you think—do you think, dear Mrs. Howe, that I can ever learn to be unselfish like Ruth?"

"I think you will be unselfish," answered her comforter, "and now what I wish is that you should let yourself be happy."

"I am so mortified about that dreadful dinner,"

said Miriam; "I have been so miserable about it I couldn't enjoy the others. The other girls have gotten up such fine dinners and I might have done so too if I had not been so foolish."

"Why not try again?" said Mrs. Howe encouragingly.

"Oh! I couldn't."

"I would if I were you."

"Would you really do it?" said Miriam, her face brightening as it had not done for days.

"Yes, indeed I should. And I should have the dinner this week."

"Could I plan a little here with you now, or would it tire you too much?"

"Not at all; nothing would give me greater pleasure. I will listen without suggesting, for if it is to be a prize dinner you must do it all yourself. I offered all of the girls the use of my especial cook books but no one has used them."

"And may I see them?"

"Yes, they are on the third shelf of that bookcase near my desk."

"And this manuscript one, is this yours?"

"Yes, in that I copied the receipts that we particularly liked."

"Oh!" exclaimed Miriam, opening at the cake pages, "white pound cake with rose decoration. What does that mean?"

"It means that the icing is colored a delicate pink and the French candied rose leaves put on in little clusters on top."

"How perfectly lovely. Could I do it?"

"Easily; I will show you how and I have a box of the rose leaves in that drawer."

"I wish I could make ice cream."

"That is not difficult. One of the men always freezes the cream."

"Let me see what kinds—peach ice cream—Oh! Mrs. Howe, let it be peach ice cream."

"It shall be as you please, my dear."

"But if it shouldn't be good."

"You know you have tried a number of things lately and they have all been right; you have the touch and the knack of a good cook."

"And I'll make some chocolate drops and peppermints for the bonbon dishes. I made just a few the other day and the girls beg me to make more."

"That will make your dessert very complete and handsome. Now for the dinner part—and remember not to attempt more than you can comfortably accomplish."

"I will not be so foolish as to refuse assistance this time," said Miriam; "but isn't it to be my dinner, no matter how many things are handed to me or put away for me?"

"Certainly it is, you could not do all; but I understand that you wish to be perfectly conscientious about it."

"I might make some things the day before."

"Yes, the cake and the candy; anything else?"

"I wish I could have some cheese straws to go with the salad."

"What salad have you chosen?"

"Lettuce mayonnaise."

"Try them," said Mrs. Howe, "and if they fail you still have biscuits."

"The soup can be ready of course, and the fish must be creamed and in little cups, for I couldn't be in the kitchen and at the table at the same time."

"No."

"But if I look after the fire and have the fish in the cups and written down just when they were to go in and come out, that would be right?"

"Yes, dear."

"I should like to have roast capon and that with the vegetables could be kept hot while I went to dinner."

"Is that all?"

"I think so, only I should like to have invitations; would you?"

"By all means. How would you like to invite Mr. Parkinson, too?"

"Delightful! I should like it of all things."

At supper time Miriam brought the letter bag, and with a very demure face, handed it to Mr. Howe.

"What is this?" he asked.

"An extra," answered Vivian.

"Extra in every sense of the word," said Mr. Howe, as—after distributing the others—he opened his exquisitely written dinner invitation.

"Oh!" exclaimed Sidney, "we cannot begin to approach this elegance. Please, grandma, issue a ukase or something and say that we may accept on the spot."

"No," replied Mrs. Howe, "when you are invited to dinner, the least you can do is to acknowledge the courtesy in due form."

A groan was the response; but the answers were written and on the breakfast table the next morning.

"Dear me," said Sidney, "but I shall be glad when this is over. The girls look so important, and I am sure Miriam will be careworn."

When the day came, luncheon was served on the piazza, the dining room being mysteriously closed until evening.

"I say, fellows," said Allan, "we'd better telegraph for new neckties or chokers or something, for how on earth are we to keep up with the elegance that seems to be preparing behind those doors."

"Miriam asked us to wear our prettiest gowns," said Tina.

"Which we will do our utmost to appreciate," said Gerald.

At six o'clock Mrs. Howe and Miriam were in the drawing room ready to receive the guests.

They had not expected to be received formally, but they were equal to the emergency, a little suppressed amusement adding to the excitement of the occasion. Miriam was exquisitely gowned in a white organdie sprayed with sweet brier draped over rose color; but her dainty costume was not half so attractive as her face, flushed and happy with pleasure.

When the dining room doors were opened, exclamations of surprise burst from several of the party and Mrs. Howe, who had given permission without being allowed to see the result, was extremely gratified to find how much Miriam had accomplished.

Daylight had been shut out and rose-shaded wax candles had been lighted in the old fashioned candelabra which matched the rich epergne in the centre of the table. Roses and rare ferns from a distant greenhouse shed a delicious fragrance through the room and were in themselves a feast of color. Bonbons and olives rested in exquisite glass dishes, alternating with the salted almonds, which Vivian declared were the only things she knew how to cook or ever expected to cook well.

Hannah had been heard to remark to Minna that there was a great deal of decoration for a very little dinner—no game and no entrees—but both were much too good hearted not to do all in their power to make it a success.

It was a success, and as the dinner progressed, the boys vied with each other in paying compliments.

"It wasn't fair, Miriam," said Helen, "to have your dinner come last; you could see all the defects in ours and avoid them."

"Please to remember," said Allan, "that Miriam paved the way for all of you. This crowning success is fairly earned."

"If Mr. Parkinson could only have come." This was Miriam's one regret.

"He certainly is the loser," said Mr. Howe. "I will try to make up for his absence by enjoying another bonbon. I seldom eat confections; but Miriam, these are the crowning feature of an altogether successful dinner."

As he said this, Mrs. Howe rose and they all went out on the piazza where it was cooler, for the lights had made the closed room very warm. Miriam found an excuse to go back for some flowers and she lingered, loth to leave the scene of her late triumph. When she returned Mrs. Howe met her and said: "Very well done, my dear, very well done indeed. I only wish your mother had been here to see."

CHAPTER XIX.

DINNER AL FRESCO.

"The girls went to a lot of trouble, didn't they?" said Allan, when Miriam's effort was being discussed.

"Yes," replied Sidney; "do you think we can do as well?"

"Better, I think; that is, in our particular style. I can't say that, up here in the country, I like hot house flowers, such a pile of silver and all the rest of it. It seemed to me just a little bit out of the way, you know."

"Incongruous?" suggested Gerald.

"Yes, that is what I mean."

"But the girls enjoyed it," said Ralph.

"Yes," said Allan, "the girls enjoyed it—girls do seem to enjoy that sort of thing—that is some girls, I am not sure that they all do. But it seems to me there was too much hard work spent on that table for the pleasure they got out of it. I don't believe I care much for decoration."

"I do," said Sidney.

"But you were born an artist," answered Allan.

"I care for decorations," said Gerald, "and I was just thinking what we could do with our table—that is if you let us help you, Allan."

"Of course, it's our dinner; I am only talking nonsense about the prize."

"What do you say to giving it out here under the big beech tree at five o'clock."

"That will be sensible," approved Sidney, "and convenient too.—Oh! I forgot, Ralph isn't sworn in."

"Don't mind me," said Ralph rising; "I am going to talk with Grafton."

"No, don't go."

"I must. I am not going to take any chances, for I intend to be first in my classes next year, if I work night and day for it."

"Hurrah for you!" said Gerald. "Where did you get this new ambition?"

"I don't know—does it strike you as new? I suspect Grafton had something to do with it."

"I wish," said Allan, as Ralph walked away, "that Solon could inspire me to that extent."

At this moment Nelson appeared. "Did you tell about the Cookers?" he asked.

"No, we give a dinner next week; after that we shall tell," explained Allan.

"A dinner by candle light in the day time?"

"No, sir, out of doors under the big beech."

"Won't the victuals get cold?"

"Not if we bring them right from the cave."

"Oh! thet's it. Wal now, thet is an idee."

"We are to open the door and give up our secret on the day of the dinner."

"About time, I should say. If I ken help ye any let me know; I must go now."

"Since Nelson has been talking," said Gerald, "I have formed a picture in my mind of how the whole thing may look."

"Paint us your picture."

"Decorations entirely of wild flowers and those exquisite ferns at Deerfoot Falls."

"Good."

"No extra silver; but some cut glass."

"Yes. What about invitations?"

"Oh!" said Sidney, "we must be particular about those; I heard Aunt Margaret tell the girls that they should not have used the mail bag. Dinner invitations must be delivered when possible by special messenger."

"And, Sidney," exclaimed Allan, "I've an idea!"

"A rarity with you—let us have it."

"If Gerald will put on that stunning archery suit of his and deliver the notes it will be great."

"I'll do it," said Gerald. "How would you like the invitations engraved on birch bark?"

"The very thing. But there should be something about The Beeches; what a pity a birch isn't a beech."

"Tie the corners," said Gerald, "with that

tough meadow grass and add tassells of beech nuts." Then he lifted his whistle to answer Mr. Grafton's call, which meant a gathering of the clan.

The next day Gerald disappeared, to return in the garb of a most picturesque page. Green velveteens, ruffled shirt and a dark green mantle thrown back over one shoulder, formed his costume.

"Hello!" called Allan, as he and Sidney met Gerald in the wood, "that velvet mantle is a telling addition. Where did you get it?"

"It is grandmama's," said Sidney. "I have seen it in one of her old chests."

"Yes," replied Gerald; "but do not detain me, I have important messages to deliver to the lords and ladies at The Beeches."

"Prythee, pretty page, of what import may be your message?"

"How may I know, good sirs. I am but a simple page."

"You're just out of sight," said Allan; "but hurry up and get back, will you?"

The girls were delighted with the invitations and charmed with the messenger. "Aunt Margaret," said Ruth, "do invite this courteous page to dinner. It would be a shame to lose him at once; he makes such a pretty picture."

"I pray you, gentle lady," pleaded Gerald, "to excuse me, I have important business else-

where," and he hastened back to the wood again.

The "al frisco" dinner, as Nelson called it, was after his own heart and when the day came he worked for it with a will. "I don't go in much for hifalutin' names," he said, "but this one seems to hev some sense to it. You say it means out o' doors an' my brother thet went mining down in Frisco, he said he hed to eat out o' doors most of the time.

"Now boys," continued Nelson, "I'm a goin' to ask a favor. I've got suthin' to bring out from the village this arternoon an' when you hear me comin' thru the bush yonder I want ye to shut the shop door an' not look till I drive to the barn."

"How shall we know, Nelson?"

"Oh! I'll sing Swanee River or suthin'; I reckon you'll know then."

"All right, we'll keep a weather ear in that direction."

"I believe it is the Parkinson prize," said Sidney; "but we won't look."

Of all the beautiful beeches in the country there is certainly none more beautiful than the one which spread its great branches over the horse-shoe table which the boys constructed early in the forenoon, or rather put together, for it had long been planned and the parts stored in the carriage house. The white drapery of

the table was bordered with deeply tinted red leaves from the swamp maples, while golden rod, purple asters and ferns formed the main decorations. Artistic bunches of scarlet berries adorned each lady's place and tiny purple thistles formed the boutonnieres.

The color scheme was further carried out in rustic baskets of fruit alternating with bowls of flowers along the table. The clusters of white and of purple grapes fell over and almost hid the crimson cheeked peaches, the golden pears and the rosy apples which lay beneath.

Gerald and Sidney arranged while Allan criticised. "There," he said finally, "I could not have done that better myself. No, don't touch a stem. It has a woodsey look that you will spoil if you do any more."

"I do think"—Sidney stepped back to get a better view—"that it is a complete contrast to the indoor table and that is what we are aiming for."

"Yes," assented Allan, "I think it will do. Now let us run over the menu to see if we have forgotten anything. Nelson, you will open the clams and put them on the ice on time."

"Ye ken jest depend thet I will."

"Wait a minute till I see if every lamp is trimmed perfectly even."

"No, you needn't," said Sidney. "If I haven't a straight eye then I haven't anything, and I looked after every one."

"You know I must have an extra one under that little table to poach the eggs."

"I know; that is all right."

"Are you quite sure of your cream for the fish sauce?" asked Gerald; "I tremble to think of the quiet sarcasm that would follow any failure in that direction."

"You need not worry; that will be all right."

"The beef is ready?"

"Yes."

"But Allan, most high and mighty commander, how do you get around having another course? I thought more than the first number was forbidden."

"I told you that Mrs. Howe had written to Mr. Parkinson to ask him what he had done with birds and he sent back the menu of a dinner which he had recently given. Didn't I show it to you?"

"No."

"Wait a minute, I'll get it. Let me see—here it is in my pocket," and as he took it out the others leaned over to read.

"I see," exclaimed Sidney, "the birds are served with dressed celery, that gives the salad at the same time. Lucky, Nelson knows how to prepare the birds, isn't it?"

"Yes, but we have enough to do; we must hurry up."

"It was good of them all to go off and leave us perfectly unhampered," said Gerald.

"Indeed it was," echoed Allan.

Mrs. Howe sat on the piazza to advise from time to time and to direct what dishes were to be carried out.

"I do wish," said Gerald, "that we could screen the door of the cave and not show the cookers until after dinner; but I see no way to do it."

Mrs. Howe agreed that the screen would be most desirable and, after some futile suggestions from each one, herself hit upon the right thing.

"There are two very large clothes horses in the laundry," she said, "if you could drape them prettily."

"We can," answered Sidney, "those curtains we took down for Aunt Margaret will do, covered with a mass of that wild grape vine just beyond the stables; the whole thing will take only a few minutes."

"There"—said Sidney a little later—"if I could send that to the Paris Salon or the Academy, my fortune would be made. Hark! There's Nelson—scatter quick, you know we promised."

"Way daoun upon the Swa-ne-ee River," came from the bush, as Nelson called a grove near the entrance; but the lugubrious notes soon ceased for there was not a person anywhere in sight. He drove to the house and then toward the stables, calling to the boys, who responded at once.

"Well, Nelson, I suppose there's some great secret."

"There jest is. But there—I aint sayin' nothin'."

"Oh! see here now—you can't put us off that way."

"Yes, I can, and I will, fur it aint my secret anyhow."

"It's grandmama's then and she said it was for this afternoon."

"Here comes the clan," said Gerald, "it's mighty good of them not to look this way. We must hurry up if we mean to get through and into clean toggery in time."

It was a perfect afternoon and perfectly happy young people were gathered under the big beech tree. The girls were in ecstacies over the shape of the table, over the decorations, over the woodland screen. Presently Miss Howe appeared: "I was waiting for mother," she said; "but Hannah brings me word that she wishes me to come out and she will follow."

The boys smiled knowingly at this and in a moment Mrs. Howe came out on the piazza accompanied by a tall gray-bearded gentleman.

"The surprise! But who is it? Who is it?" exclaimed the girls.

"I know, it must be Mr. Parkinson."

"Right you are, Tina," said Allan.

"Cheer, oh! cheer," exclaimed Vivian, "why don't you cheer, boys?"

And they did give a rousing cheer, as, genial and smiling, their honored guest approached the table and was given the seat at Mrs. Howe's right hand.

For a moment the little-necks were neglected for the menu cards. Small shell-like tree fungi had been carefully etched by Sidney's ready hand. The name of the guest, the menu of the dinner, and a little spider web were on each one. On Tina's the web was nearly covered by an all-out-of-proportion spider.

"My favorite soup—how did you manage it?" said Mr Howe, greatly surprised. "And isn't this menu more or less mythical?" he inquired; "you surely could not do all this away from the house."

"Better skip a part of this hearty soup;" advised Mr. Parkinson; "you will be like the small boy who cried because he couldn't eat more, before you get through."

"Have you faith that it is all *bona fide*?"

"It does not require much faith for me to believe it," was the reply.

"Dear, dear, which shall I skip?" asked Miriam as she read:

"Trout baked in cream, roast beef, baked tomatoes, cauliflower, quail with celery, creamed rice, fruit—coffee."

"Yes, which?" Vivian looked quizzically at Allan.

"Skip the course which you girls can cook better than we fellows can."

"Kindly postpone our humiliation," begged Vivian.

Miss Howe was most enthusiastic over the quail. "The perfection of flavor," she insisted.

"But own up, boys," exhorted Mr. Howe, "you didn't get this absolutely ideal creamed rice pudding out of your sand oven."

"We absolutely did, Uncle Earle," and Sidney enjoyed Mr. Parkinson's amused smile.

"So you are the villain in the play, are you, Parkinson?" said Mr. Howe, addressing him.

"Didn't I tell you I would convert you to my latest hobby, when you refused to listen."

"Tell him, Mr. Parkinson," said Sidney.

"When the boys came to me about their cooking, I saw my opportunity," Mr. Parkinson turned to Uncle Earle, "but what they have done has gone beyond my most sanguine expectations."

While they chatted the pudding was removed and the fruit and coffee were served.

"I regret exceedingly that I could not get here for Miss Miriam's dinner; but I have brought something with me which I hope will atone for my absence on that occasion," said Mr. Parkinson, as he rose to direct Nelson and his assistant who carried a mysterious box which they placed behind his chair.

"The prize! The prize! Yes, Miriam's prize." There was no question at all as to whom it belonged.

Miriam went over to Mr. Howe and spoke to him in a low tone. "To be perfectly fair I am afraid I shall have to do it," he answered. Then to Parkinson: "I wrote you that Miss Miriam Snowdon had taken the prize, but I find this dinner of Allan's better in some respects and honesty compels me to appear unchivalrous."

"It is all right," said Miriam cheerily; "but I do wish I knew what is in the box."

"The newest and most improved Cooker."

"Such as the boys have! Such as they cooked this dinner with!" The girls grew more and more excited.

"Yes, only a little better, and it gives me a keen pleasure to present this one to the hero of the hour."

"There is a slight mistake, Mr Parkinson,"—Allan rose gracefully and spoke well—"Miss Miriam won her prize fairly and honestly; but as for me, Nelson and the fellows helped me any amount and, after all, we did not do it—it was the Cooker."

"Who says that chivalry is dead?" said Mr. Parkinson, as he drew Miriam's arm through his and led her to the box and explained to her with the other interested listeners, the various capabilities of the prize which it contained.

"Now, boys, where are yours? You said you would show them to-day. The time has expired." All of the girls were eager in their exclamations.

"Only one thing makes me hesitate," said Allan, as Sidney and Gerald drew aside the screen, "and that is that Tina is afraid of spiders."

"Oh! what a goose I was," exclaimed Tina; "it is the smoke house after all."

CHAPTER XX.

THE HORSE SHOW.

Vivian was the only one of the girls who had ever seen a real horse show, a fact which gave her a certain prominence during the preparations for carrying out Mr. Graves' idea and the privilege of correcting some mistakes which the boys inadvertently made.

"Yes," admitted Gerald one morning at breakfast, "you are right, Vivian; but this is in the country and a little different I think; we might do some things differently here."

"I suspect, after all," said Mr. Howe, "that we shall not have much to say about it. We have been such a close corporation at The Beeches, with so many interests of our own, we forget that other people may possibly have notions quite opposed to ours."

"I do feel," said Ruth laughing, "as if it should all be as we say."

"Not really, my child."

"Why no, grandmama, but when we do things it all seems to come out right, and I have visited girls where everything was hit-and-miss, like Martha's new quilt."

"Look out, Ruth, pride goes before a fall"—Sidney held up a warning finger.

"And you think my Lady Gray will tumble me off at the horse show. Maybe she will; but I don't believe it."

"I am not a Methusaleh"—Mr. Grafton met a general smile as he spoke for he had such a youthful air; "but I have had some experience, and I should like to say that I have never spent a summer when I have seen so much good leadership and so little time wasted on the preliminaries of pleasure."

"Behold!"—Allan included the whole party in a wave of his hand—"behold the future leaders of society, of reform, of political parties and of things generally."

"Yes, and all of us always right," added Ruth.

"Here is a suggestive scrap," said Mr. Howe, who held the morning paper in his hand.

"Read it to us please."

" 'I go for my party, right or wrong,
It's the only way to fight.
'You do?' said another, hot and strong;
'I go for my party right.'

"The worst of it was the right was wrong,
And the man so full of fight
Had sometimes a wicked platform strong
And seldom one that was right."

"But one thing cannot be wrong," said Sidney, "and that is that Mr. Grafton shall be the leader of our cavalcade at the horse show. He

modestly insists that I shall occupy that position; but I absolutely decline."

"Surely," insisted Miss Howe, "the master of the horse should lead on this occasion," as she rose to greet Mr. Graves and his daughter who had just arrived.

"We won't apologize," began Mr. Graves in his hearty voice, "for such an early call, for it is the only time to make sure of you. Such activity as you display stirs the blood in my veins, and I believe I shall have to grow young again in spite of myself."

"Indeed it is very good of you to come over early, and we were talking over the plans for Thursday. Is there any way in which our party can be of assistance to-day?"

"I believe so. First of all, Miss Howe, did you intend to ride with the others?"

"No, I shall not ride," answered Miss Howe.

"I wish," began Ruth; but Sidney caught her eye with a merry glance and gave his head the least possible shake.

"I am very glad," Mr. Graves spoke quickly, "for I wish very much to have you help me in giving the prizes."

"That will be a great pleasure," she answered.

"There is another matter," he continued, "and that is, the bringing up of these fresh air children has caused more or less unfavorable comment among some of the workmen here.

Bush and Daly were talking over at the track yesterday and I heard Bush say he didn't see why, if the bloated bond-holders had so much money to spend, they didn't do more for the church here. That it had been tough times with the farmers, and the children hadn't had any too much done for them."

"I am afraid that is true; but we have been thinking—"

"Then Daly added—" Mr. Graves went on unconsciously ignoring Miss Howe's remark—"that he didn't believe much in furrin missions anyway, and he thought the fresh air children might have been left at home."

"Oh! I know!" exclaimed Vivian.

"What's that?" asked Mr. Graves, evidently surprised at the interruption; but there was no reply, and Vivian declared afterwards that he nearly scared her out of her wits. "I beg your pardon," she said hurriedly, and Mr. Graves continued:—

"I had an idea, Mr. Howe, if you approved, we could make room for the scholars from your Sunday school and give them a picnic afterwards. Several of the residents here would like to join in that."

"Admirable idea," answered Mr. Howe.

"I should like very much to have your young ladies who have taught in the Sunday School sit with the children; but of course they cannot

since they ride; but we must manage it somehow."

"I think Miss Graves and I could arrange that, could we not?" asked Miss Howe.

The other lady quietly assented. She was a timid person who dutifully carried out her father's ideas: but she was gratefully glad of Margaret Howe's assistance.

"May I offer a suggestion, sir?" asked Gerald with his most deferential tone.

"Yes, certainly," Mr. Graves turned toward him.

"Do you think it would be a good thing to offer one of the prizes for the best agricultural team—would it interest the farmers?"

"Might—might—I believe it would be a good idea. I'll do that and advertise it right away. Come Lavinia," to his daughter, "we must be going."

"Bless you, bless you," said Allan, when they were out of sight. "I didn't dare lift my voice after Vivian was squelched; but I feel that your courage has redeemed the honor of this party."

"Now then," advised Mr. Howe, "it seems to me that the best thing to be done is for you, Grafton, to go over and settle all the details. If you need me I will come; otherwise I will attend to some things here."

"I heard Mr. Graves say," said Ruth, that he wished very much to have a floral arch at the

entrance, but there was no one to undertake it.''

''It's a tremendous undertaking,'' answered Sidney, ''I tried one once.''

''Unless you want me for something else, I'd like to see if I could do it,'' said Ralph, who was anxious to help but did not seem to find anything to take hold of.

''I'd like to go with you,'' said Ernest.

''Very well, go over with Mr. Grafton; perhaps you can spring the arch to-day and get it started.''

Never had there been more busy days at The Beeches. Mrs. Howe, Ruth and Miriam were closely occupied with garments for various small tots who had sprung up by the wayside as it were, and who would never be able to understand why they were left out if their mothers kept them at home from the festivities. Helen and Tina worked steadily with Miss Howe on the decorations for the boxes and Vivian did something in helping them—a great deal they said—although she worked fitfully and was off as soon as possible, bent upon carrying out what for the time being was the main aim and object of her existence.

She and Gerald were the only ones who did not hurry away from the stables. They were the only ones who found time during the day to take extra rides rather than rest on the piazzas.

They would ride out with a very grave air; but, once on the road, Vivian would start up at a rapid pace hastening to pass the turn where they might meet anyone of the home party.

"Don't get so excited," Gerald would say, "it unfits you for good work."

"I am not excited at all," was the invariable reply, and then they would dismount, change horses and Vivian would continue her practice with Fulano.

"He certainly is the most intelligent creature I ever saw," she said one morning, "and I believe he understands every word I say. Bay Beauty is lovely; but Don Fulano is superb."

"You feel perfectly at ease on him?"

"Perfectly. I am sure he likes me."

"Yes, I am sure of it too. And now we must go back or someone will suspect what we are doing."

But there were too many interests for these special rides to be noticed and the great day came without any hint of Vivian's plan to ride Fulano getting afloat.

September was more than usually beautiful that year. There was enough rain but not too much. Beautiful skies and refreshing breezes made perfect weather, so all the young people said and the older ones agreed with them.

Mr. Graves had planned his programme according to his own idea; but he had re-arranged

it somewhat afterwards and now everything was as nearly satisfactory to everybody as possible under any circumstances and all who were to take part were in high spirits.

The driving park was transformed into a scene of gayety quite surpassing anything before seen in that part of the country. The floral arch at the entrance was pronounced a marvel; but it took until almost the last minute to get the last plumes of golden rod and clusters of dahlias in place. When Ralph and Ernest reached home they found that they were being anxiously watched for, great fear having been expressed lest they should be late.

Miss Howe with Miss Graves had perfected their arrangements for the children, making sure that all should be seated so that every one could see to advantage, and the committee in charge of the boxes had finished their work some hours before; there was nothing to be thought of now except the order of the cavalcade.

Mr. Howe, who had declined to be one of the judges took a seat by his mother's side in the carriage from which she, interested and smiling, watched the movements of the equestrian party.

Mr. Grafton was cool and calm; but the only other person who betrayed no excitement was Gerald. He was a little in the rear and leaned with affected carelessness against Bay Beauty's side while he held Fulano's bridle in his left

hand. When the others mounted and trotted ahead or wheeled about waiting for the word of command, he came up to the steps, as Vivian, flushed and radiant, with dark eyes flashing and head erect came out of the front door. In an instant she had mounted Fulano and Gerald on Bay Beauty was at her side.

"Gerald! Vivian! What are you going to do?" These and other exclamations made Mr. Grafton turn to see what was the matter. In a flash he comprehended the situation, and his first thought was one of admiration for the brave girl. He turned to Mr. Howe to see if he approved and, receiving a nod in reply to his questioning look, he rode up to Vivian:

"Are you sure you can do it?" he asked.

"Perfectly sure. I can, can't I, Gerald?"

"Yes, I am sure you can," he replied.

Mrs. Howe was troubled: "It is a wilful act," she said to her son.

"Yes," he answered, "Vivian is wilful; but she hasn't stopped to think this time."

"None of them know, do they, that the prize you will give is the rider's own horse? I mean the one that has been called his through the summer."

"No."

Mr. Grafton rode up and down the line, critically inspecting each horse and its rider. Then —all being satisfactory—they filed slowly out

of the avenue on their way to the park, where they were eagerly expected. In addition to their number, seven young ladies and ten young men who were staying in the neighborhood, had come with their saddle horses to compete for the blue ribbon. Several carriage teams were in fine shape, each coachman determined to win the red ribbon, and a score of farmers were bringing in their teams to compete for the green.

Each new arrival was welcomed with cheers; the boys of the Sunday School and the older members of the fresh air contingent shouting themselves hoarse in the most intense enjoyment.

"Say, Jack, which o' them teams do you say 'll get the prize? I choose the big bays."

"Pshaw, Jim, there ain't a team there that can hold a candle to the judge's blacks. Whoop-la!" as Judge Long drove up in a light surrey which held beside himself three merry looking girls. Snooks, most aristocratic of pugs, sat up on his mistress's lap and looked down condescendingly on all inferior beings beneath him. The dog made a sensation among the children: "Look out!" "I say, don't throw me down," and, "I'll pitch you over," betrayed the growing excitement; but Miss Howe interfered and good humor again prevailed.

"There they come. There they are. There's the Kentucky thoroughbreds," and again there was shouting and laughter. In the midst of

the shoving and pushing, one little fellow unconsciously dropped himself through the seats down to the grass below, where—although quite unhurt—he howled with mortification at the gibes that were cast after him.

"Shut up, it's going to begin," and a tall supple youth lifted the little chap back to his place, every woe pacified by the promise of the show.

It was a brilliant scene. The trees about the park which already showed autumnal hints, formed a fitting background for the picture of moving life and pleasure. The boxes were gay with handsome costumes, with waving flags and with flowers, and in the two groups of children each one was decked in holiday array.

The horses felt the influence of the hour and moved as if they felt it incumbent upon them to carry themselves with dignity and spirit. First came the carriage teams; but their showing was felt to be a mere form. Snooks said as plain as a pug could that there was no use trying to compete with the team he sat behind, and there was not.

Among the farm teams was a span of bay colts, raised and trained by their owner, perfectly matched and warranted on account of their strength and steadiness to do any amount of work required. These were favorites and would have taken the prize had it not been for

a pair of Norman grays which, after much discussion were awarded the green ribbon.

But the real excitement was over the saddle horses. The first time around the track the party from The Beeches all kept together, then—an idea of Mr. Graves'—they were separated and coupled with strangers. Don Fulano, sensitive and quick, objected to the horse at whose side he was placed, while the other horse, apparently nettled by this lack of appreciation on Fulano's part, was inclined to be restive. Vivian had not anticipated such a contingency, but proved herself equal to the emergency. She spoke soothingly to her horse, determined not to get excited herself, while Gerald, who was too far away to render any immediate assistance, watched to see if anything serious would happen.

The parade was nearly over when the horse next to Vivian gave a vicious bite at Fulano. The black reared and there was a breathless instant among the spectators, while Gerald broke the ranks to go to Vivian's assistance. There was no need. Skilfully she brought down her proud steed and, loosening her rein, trotted away from the offender, while cries of "The black, the black, the blue ribbon for the black!" resounded through the enclosure.

CHAPTER XXI.

AN EXPEDITION GHOSTWARD.

There was much merriment on the way home to The Beeches and they came in with Fulano wearing his blue ribbon proudly, while Vivian enjoyed to the full the congratulations which with sincere unselfishness they lavished upon her.

Mr. Howe stood on the piazza waiting. Mrs. Howe and Miss Margaret sat near. One by one the riders dismounted—Gerald on Bay Beauty keeping in the background, until, at a signal from Mr. Howe, who stepped down to meet him, he came up to the door and jumping to the ground handed his bridle to the older man.

A surprised murmur ran through the group on the piazza. "Is it—can it be the prize?"

Yes, it was the prize, and no one was so completely surprised as Vivian when she was called upon to accept it. "This makes the whole thing complete."—It was Ruth who expressed what she felt must be the general sentiment of the party.

"It has been a howling success," said Sidney.

"Yes," said Ralph; "but as Nelson says, I am all tuckered out."

"And I am so tired," said Miriam, while Ernest disappeared to rest before dinner.

"It was fine; but I have had pleasure enough for two days crowded into one." Helen threw herself down in an easy chair with an air of perfect satisfaction.

"I haven't," exclaimed Allan. "I wish this day could last a year, and that I could keep going all the time."

"So do I," echoed Gerald.

"Take me with you in your gyrations," added Mr. Grafton.

"Really," said Miss Howe, "it does seem a pity not to do something more."

"Why can't we go out on horseback after dinner?" Vivian spoke eagerly, her eyes glowing at the thought.

"What says the master of the horse?" Miss Howe turned to Mr. Grafton, apparently as much interested as Vivian at the thought.

"It will be moonlight," he answered, "and a glorious night."

"Splendid!" said Allan and Gerald in a breath.

"And we won't start till the moon is up," said Vivian, clapping her hands. "May I ride Don?"—this teasingly to Gerald.

"Not at night, if I have any wits left about me," was the answer.

"Would you like to go?"—Vivian had seen

Tina's eager look and knew that the young girl was too timid to speak for herself.

"Oh, yes!" Tina answered so gratefully that Vivian could not help laughing at her.

Dinner was served at six o'clock. Then riding habits were donned and the riding party mingled on the piazza with those who preferred, they said, to have some strength left for the morrow.

When the moon was seen climbing over the tree tops, Mr. Grafton, Allan and Gerald started for the stables and soon their horses with those for Miss Howe, Tina and Vivian were at the door.

They rode out at an easy pace, enjoying the coolness and the moonlight while they chatted with each other. Presently Mr. Grafton said: "What is the line of march, Miss Howe?"

Vivian drew up Bay Beauty; she did not wish to hear any directions. Gerald checked Fulano to keep at her side. "Why do you stop?" he asked.

"Oh! don't ask any questions," she said; "on such a glorious night, I am going to do just what I please."

"I am afraid you are," answered Gerald, not knowing quite what to expect from the excited air of the young girl at his side.

Miss Howe agreed with Mr. Grafton that it would be better to keep to the open roads, turn-

ing where they liked, but avoiding the bridle paths so charming in the daylight.

Allan had stopped to shorten a stirrup, but he was not so far back as the others. "Shall I turn," asked Mr. Grafton, "and tell them all to follow us?"

"Yes," said Miss Howe, "they should follow on the highway; the bridle paths are scarcely safe at night, I think."

They did follow for a time, walking, trotting and at times breaking into a gallop. The night was so beautiful it seemed better to go slowly and drink in the loveliness; at least so thought the leaders, who slackened speed and continued to talk. As they gained the crest of a little hill they struck the piece of road which for a short distance was the finest for a gallop in all the country around. The horses started up from force of habit without waiting for a signal, and their riders, appreciating the situating, let them go.

A little ahead was the turn into the wood-road which led to the deserted lodge of Castle Silent. When she reached this turn Vivian guided Bay Beauty into the woods, and galloped on, determined not to listen even if Gerald asked her to go back. He followed, not at all concerned. The road was perfectly plain in the moonlight and much lovelier than the other way.

"I hope Miss Howe won't mind," he said as

soon as he could make Vivian hear; "she wished us to keep together."

"I cannot help it," she answered, "it is my only chance so far as I can see."

"Chance for what?"

"To see the ghost."

"But you don't think," said Gerald, hoping to keep her in the road, "you don't think that the ghost will appear because you have come to look for him."

"I don't know; perhaps he will."

"What are you going to do?"

"I shall turn into this bridle path where I was yesterday. We can see Castle Silent and I will wait a few minutes and look. If there is a ghost there and he knows how badly I wish to see him, he will certainly appear to me."

"But Vivian, you do not really believe in the ghost, and I don't think this path is quite safe in the night; you might get off in that little ravine."

"Oh! no, I won't. I studied this ground thoroughly yesterday, and I was simply enchanted when I found that we could come to-night."

"If you were not so excited, you would see that we would better go back."

"I am not at all excited, and I am determined to see the ghost."

As she spoke she turned into the bridle path

and Gerald felt obliged to follow. The moon went under some light clouds and, although they could still see their way very well, they realized it would not be pleasant to have it any darker.

"There," said Vivian, as the moon sailed calmly out again, "there is Castle Silent."

"Yes," replied Gerald, "now I hope you are satisfied. There is nothing more to see; but it will be better to wait a few minutes for that heavy cloud will soon hide the moon and you might not escape the ravine. It is not deep but it does not take a deep place to break a bone."

"I will wait," said Vivian, "I wish to wait."

The Castle looked absolutely deserted — no lights were visible anywhere except that the moonlight fell on the windows from the outside and made them appear as if lighted from within. The moon went slowly under the cloud and the windows darkened. Gerald gave one glance at the sky and saw that in another minute or two it would be safe to move on. "Hark!" he exclaimed, "I hear Grafton's whistle." Then, as he turned from Vivian and peered into the darkness, a strange thing happened which he did not see. Vivian, who was looking intently at the Castle, saw a light in the library which spread and brightened until the figure of a man was clearly defined within the room. She shuddered and Bay Beauty trembled. The light

faded—the moon was coming out. She did not scream; but at that instant a whip-poor-will, disturbed perhaps by the riders, swished through the bushes near Bay Beauty's head and the horse already startled, swerved to one side, stumbled on a round stone and fell, throwing Vivian who had almost forgotten that she held a rein.

One word to Fulano and Gerald was at her side. The horse was struggling to right herself —she might fall upon Vivian. Gerald lifted the girl—quickly pulled her into a place of safety—then turned in a flash to help Bay Beauty. Only an instant; but it was too late. Bay Beauty had fallen into the ravine.

"Are you hurt, Vivian!" Gerald turned anxiously towards her.

"No, no. What can I do?"

"Stand by Fulano's head and hold his bridle firmly." Then Gerald lifted his whistle to his lips and blew a long steady call.

Mr. Grafton answered at once and almost immediately joined them. He and Gerald went down into the ravine to see what was to be done and in a few minutes they had returned. "Gerald will take you home with my horse, Miss Vivian, and I will wait here until he comes back."

"What are you going to do; can't I help?"

"I am sorry to say you cannot. It is too bad; but there is only one thing to be done—Mr.

Howe will not be able to advise anything different—Bay Beauty's leg is broken and she must be shot."

"But I won't have her shot!"

"My dear young lady, there is nothing else to be done."

"But I won't have her shot!" repeated Vivian. "Oh, Gerald, must she be shot?"

"No. Excuse me, Mr. Grafton, but I have seen such an accident once before. I can get chloroform almost as soon as I can get the revolver. Won't you take Vivian home and then come back to me?"

Gerald scarcely waited for the answer; he bounded lightly on Don's back, drew up his rein, patted the horse's neck and said: "Old fellow, I want to get to that shop like lightning; do you understand?"

Don did understand, and such a run that was through the moonlight and back again; but oh! how long it seemed to Vivian. As soon as Gerald had mounted she began to climb down into the ravine, and Mr. Grafton—divining her intention—said not a word in remonstrance but helped her through the bushes down to the rocks below. There lay Bay Beauty with her great brown eyes turned toward them. Vivian put her arms about the horse's neck and waited. She did not speak; she did not cry; she only listened for the sound of Fulano's return.

"Here I am," said Gerald, joining them, "now come, Vivian."

"No, Gerald," and she kept a hand on her favorite's neck until every sign of pain had disappeared and Bay Beauty lay still before her.

"If you will go now," said Mr. Grafton, "I promise you that I will not leave Bay Beauty until I know that she is dead."

"You promise?"

"I promise."

Vivian turned to Gerald who helped her back into the bridle path. Not a word was spoken as he took her home. There was a group of waiting figures on the piazza; but Vivian saw no one; blindly she dashed past them up to her own room, where,shutting out everyone,she supposed, except herself, she threw off all restraint, bursting into a wild passion of tears.

Tina, who had followed, dared not attempt to soothe her. She had never seen anything like this before and stood with clasped hands, helpless. At last Vivian saw her.—"Lock the door," she said; "don't let anybody come in."

To each knock Tina answered: "Please wait, she doesn't want anything," and Vivian, grateful for Tina's persistence, was at last persuaded to go to bed, where she soon fell into the sleep which follows complete exhaustion.

The next day she begged so earnestly to be let alone that the request was granted, although

reluctantly, for the musicians were almost in despair.

"She may fail us entirely," said Miss Howe.

"Then we must do the best we can," answered Gerald, "for the tickets are all out and the people will come."

"I am awfully sorry"—and Allan looked quite distressed—"I wanted to get up this kitten song this morning. Vivian's meou is inimitable and it would please the children so." He sat turning over the leaves of one of Edward Lear's nonsense books when a sudden thought struck him. Leaving the rest to rearrange the programme, he went out to the piazza and walking up and down under Vivian's window repeated twice in a sing-song tone these lines:—

"There was a young woman who knew
Like a kitten exactly to mew;
But she mewed herself up,
Shedding tears by the cup,
So the musical faded from view."

At last the window opened:—"Allan?"

"Hello!"

"Won't the musical go on without me?"

"Can Hamlet etc., etc.?"—

"Nonsense!" Vivian shut the window with a bang, turned to her mirror, made a few hasty changes in her toilet, and tripped down to the morning room, where she found the late unpleasantness quite ignored and the coming musical the absorbing topic of the hour.

CHAPTER XXII.

FINAL EXPLOIT OF THE KNIGHTS.

"You're so taken up with the musical, Allan, I get no chance to talk with you at all."

"Well there must be a chance, for—musical or no musical—I am not going to give up what we set out to do just after I came here."

"Perhaps we would better give it up."

"Not I."

"After all there may be nothing in it; Nelson may be mistaken."

"Do you think so? I don't. Do you remember the morning he said he was going once more over the whole situation?"

"Indeed I do. If I had known what he was talking about I'd have gotten out of the way in a hurry; but I never suspected."

"Of course you didn't. But you do know now and I say the moral responsibility rests upon you to use your knowledge."

"Don't be absurd, Allan."

"I don't think Nelson is so absurd. He has a superstition that if the ring is found, it will make everything right. Now why shouldn't it? Isn't it the way things go in the books?"

"Yes, in books—in novels."

"Well, I'd rather make a novel than write one. I'm nothing if not original; but I tell you what it is, the time is growing short and we'll have to brighten up our wits. I want you to go with me now and—"

"Allan, Allan, where are you?" called a voice from indoors.

"Here I am," Allan responded, as Vivian appeared on the piazza.

"Can you come and practice with me?" she asked. "Ruth wants me to go with her later to see Miss Graves and there won't be a minute."

"Certainly," called Allan; but he threw a woeful look at Sidney.

"Give it up, I say," advised Sidney.

"Never—die first. Look out or you'll lose your spurs, Sir Philip."

"I may lose them anyway if I follow such a reckless knight of the thistle as you are."

"Hist!" said Allan tragically; "take what rest you may in the early hours of the night; but leave your door ajar—I shall waken you at midnight."

"What for?"

"To prove whether you are a true knight-errant."

"What do you mean to do?"

"Time will reveal; I must go now to the music."

When Allan did waken him Sidney had no idea of the hour, and he persisted in considering the whole thing a joke until Allan had spoken again and again, always softly, under his breath.

"It is too early anyway," he said at last.

"Early!" Allan held his watch before Sidney's eyes; "hurry up I say."

"You have forgotten the dogs; they will bark as we go out."

"No, they won't. Guard is right here at this end of the piazza. I'll speak to him softly—there he is wagging his tail against the floor—we are all right; put out the light and come."

Allan slipped to the ground, Sidney followed, and without speaking they took a round-about course to the road so as to avoid rousing the stables. Allan, who had skilfully planned the expedition, made for the pile of stones which marked the hollow tree where he had hidden his lantern and shovel. "Here, take these," he said, "while I pick up the apples. I had my pockets full when I was here this afternoon and I left them, for I thought we'd be thirsty before we got through. They're fine juicy ones."

"Good idea; my pockets are at your service."

"I say Sid," Allan was very serious, "I had a new idea about that ring this afternoon."

"Oh! yes, you are always having new ideas about it; but don't expect me to follow them."

"This one is the natural course of evolution."

"Well, I can't evolute unless you explain."

"Exactly so. Now if you had thought of it, you would have been the leader and I the follower. It is ideas that make the difference between master and slave in this world."

"What ideas—think of what?"

"Why you know Nelson has been over there and dug and dug and we have followed like two silly lambs where he led. We've searched and we've dug too; but always in the same spot where Nelson saw the ring fall."

"He didn't say any particular spot."

"No, but he has dug always in one place, proof conclusive that he considers it *the* place."

"I don't see that we have gained much by knowing that."

"Listen!—There is a big tree just identically behind the hole where Nelson was at work when we first discovered him. A ring might have been thrown against the tree and it might have caromed at an angle that could have thrown it some distance from where it struck. I have been over there by myself prospecting and I am almost sure I have struck the right trail."

"But you don't know from what direction it was thrown."

"Yes, I do. I didn't go quite over to-day for Nelson was making a final search and going through a pantomime to refresh his memory. He was talking to himself as usual when he is alone, and he said:—

"'She stood here, and he stood there,' and then—lifting his hand—he threw an imaginary something directly toward the tree. That gave me the notion of the carom."

Taking the short cut, they soon reached the lodge. Allan stopped short and listened. "What is the matter?" asked Sidney.

"Nothing, only—since the Castle is haunted—"

"A knight of the thistle afraid of a ghost," Sidney laughed softly.

"No, no, that's not it"—impatiently—"don't fool, Sid, I tell you I am in earnest."

"Well, what about the ghost?"

"It's not a ghost, but humans bent on mischief that I fear. I had no idea until the horse show how many stray men there were about. We must make dead sure as we go along."

"All right, what else?"

"Nothing, I guess. It isn't likely that anybody except ourselves will be geese enough to come this way, and we can stop once in a while to listen."

"Hush!" said Sidney, "I hear some one now."

"It is only a stray dog," answered Allan, relieved, after an instant of listening.

"Perhaps he belongs at the lodge."

"No, there is neither man nor beast left on the premises. No inhabitants of any kind except the ghost."

"I am not sure—I think I hear steps—let us wait a few minutes and see."

"Glad we brought the apples," returned Allan, taking one from his pocket; "they sort of fill in the pauses."

"I am glad we did," was the answer, as Sidney bit into another pippin; "but the time is just skipping. It is almost daylight."

"Come on then, I don't believe there's a soul within a mile of us;" and they had soon reconnoitered the front of the house and passed around to the back.

"Here's the tree?" exclaimed Sidney, for it had grown quite light by the time they had reached it.

"The very one. Now then you see what I mean. All of this ground has been interviewed by Nelson, yourself and yours truly, and what I say is that a carom might have sent the ring over there."

"Then it would have been likely to fall over into that pile of sand."

"Precisely."

"A needle in a haystack would be a mild comparison to it then."

"I'm not so sure. Now I'll swing myself over," and Allan—suiting the action to the word—caught hold of a sapling, threw himself over the ledge and landed on the heap of building sand. "Toss me that shovel, will you," he said; "and now you come."

"Allan, you are the most—"

"Yes, driveling idiot if the ring is not found —if it is you will call me a genius."

Sidney followed the shovel and the search began. "We may find something," he said; "this place has been deserted so long, who knows but there is a treasure-trove hidden right here."

"Ah, ha! Now you are interested. You can get a new blood and thunder story out of it anyway for your next magazine effort; that will be one treasure."

"I have an idea for a good story, I think— suppose I tell it to you."

"All right, fire ahead."

The time passed quickly. Sidney, absorbed in his own creation, searched in a half-hearted manner; but Allan delved in the sand, or put aside promising pieces of stone, working like a man with a set purpose, which he is bent upon pursuing to its final conclusion.

"What are you doing down there?"—a bold commanding voice rang out from the ledge above. —"Why Allan—Sidney—what on earth?" and Gerald, following their manner of descent, soon stood beside them.

For an instant there was an awkward silence, then Allan, resting on the shovel, asked: "What brings you here at cock-crow, my friend?"

"It is long past cock-crow," laughed Gerald; "but I came for some music that I had left in

the lodge and needed to use right after breakfast this morning. I will not ask what you came for; I think I know."

"Do you?" Sidney spoke too eagerly, but he could not recall his words, and the slight look of annoyance faded from Allan's face as Gerald answered: "Well, you were so determined to fool the girls about the oven, you are probably getting up some trap for them now. I don't quite see, though, how you would bring them down here."

"It is a climb from above," said Allan; "but not so bad through the woods and up from the ravine."

"Hello!" exclaimed Gerald, "what's this? Did either of you drop this ring?"

Allan and Sidney gave a quick glance at each other as Gerald stooped down, and in the sand displaced by his foot, where Allan had been digging, picked up the long sought and greatly desired treasure. He handed it to one and then to another, but meeting only a blank stare in either case, he looked to see what it was that he had found. "No, I see it is not yours," he said; "it must be Uncle Hugh's, for it is his crest cut on heliotrope, his favorite stone. But how could it have come here? It must have been here a long time. I suppose it could have lain here in this dry place a good while without injury."

Gerald talked on, yet he was growing slightly

uncomfortable, for it was strange to have the others say nothing, not even express surprise or ask to look at the ring. At last Allan recovered himself: "Yes, it must be your uncle's," he said; "and now we must get back; it must be almost breakfast time."

"I'll overtake you when I find the music;" and Gerald, slipping the ring on his finger, turned toward the lodge not a little mystified at the strange behavior of his friends. He made no effort to overtake them, but walked rather slowly toward The Beeches. Near the house he met Nelson and he was not at all surprised to have him stop short in the path, for Nelson generally had something on his mind. What did surprise him was to have him say: "Excuse me, Mr. Gerald, but you don't generally wear a ring, do you?" From another man this might have been an impertinence, but Nelson was a privileged character, and he answered:

"Not generally; but I have just picked this one up. It must be one my uncle lost some time ago."

"Did ye find it over there by the big tree by the new part."

"No, in the sand below."

"Wal I never! Did ye know—?" Nelson stopped short; he began to realize that his curiosity was betraying too much knowledge about the ring, and he hastily added: "I reckon

it was jest as well *you* found it,'' and passed on.

Gerald looked after him a moment, half inclined to call him back, then he looked at the ring, and, not knowing exactly why, slipped it off his finger and dropped it into a pocket of his vest.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE RAYMOND CREST.

Upon Miss Howe and Vivian really depended the success of the musical. Allan's versatility would carry him easily over the lighter parts, and Gerald played with unerring touch and correct taste the comparatively simple numbers which were all that he would allow himself to attempt. But Vivian had been more ambitious, especially in the duets, and she now had a good deal of responsibility, which Miss Howe shared, resting upon her.

She felt keenly the consequences of her rashness—her deliberate disobedience—and, although everyone was perfectly kind about it, forgetting apparently that anything had gone amiss, she herself could not forget that it was a blot upon the beauty of the summer. She worked all the harder now because of her desire to add as much as possible to the pleasure of this entertainment and obliterate, so far as she might, the memory of her former wilfulness.

"I am afraid I have attempted too much," she said to Miss Howe as they went into the tower room to get ready for the final rehearsal.

"I do not think that you have."

"Up here it is all right," continued Vivian, "you are in perfect accord, Gerald is a born musician, and Tina worships music although she does not understand it. But down stairs there may be the unsympathetic atmosphere, and suppose, oh! Miss Howe, suppose the people should talk. I cannot understand, can you, how persons can talk in the presence of good music."

"Yes, I think I can understand it."

"Oh! I am so sorry—I didn't suppose you could."

"Why, Vivian dear, they simply do not listen, that is all. Many of those who are indifferent do love music, but, when their neighbors chatter, they do not wish to appear singular and so they chatter too. I have been glad of the chatter sometimes to cover my confusion."

"I hadn't thought of that."

"You will not need to think of it this time I am sure. And you must remember that there are enough of us about you who do care for your playing and who will thoroughly enjoy it."

"Don't you think Allan has too many things on the programme?" Vivian was experiencing the bad quarter of an hour which so often precedes a performance and when one trouble was disposed of she found another.

"No, I think not. Allan's idea is to give the most pleasure to the greatest number; I am sure

he is not thinking of himself or of how many times he is to appear with his banjo."

"Oh! Allan never thinks of himself," answered Vivian; "here he comes now with Gerald and Tina."

It was an afternoon of hard work. Miss Howe insisted upon a break when "Intermission" came upon the programme, so that they might each take a brisk walk or a short horseback ride, and then they gathered again to work for another hour.

"*Quantum sufficit!*" exclaimed Allan at last. "I do not any longer know boots from a banjo. Somebody tie up my head or make a few hypnotic passes over me, won't you?"

"I advise change of scene," said Vivian.

"But first tell me," answered Allan; "who is to be musical librarian to-morrow evening."

"Yourself," was the quick reply; for Vivian had learned that Allan, in spite of his apparent carelessness could always be depended upon in an emergency.

"I accept the position." And in a few minutes the scattered sheets were laid in regular order. "May I leave everything right here?"—turning to Miss Howe.

"It will be the safest place," she answered, and then, as they all left the room, she sank into an easy chair by the window.

Gerald turned back and crossed over to where

she was sitting:—"You are very tired," he said; "can I do anything for you?"

"I am never tired, you know, Gerald,"—she looked up smiling—"but perhaps I am a little weary."

He smiled back, not fully comprehending, yet catching—little as she suspected it—some inkling of her meaning. Within the last few days stray words had fallen upon his ears and he had been putting two and two together.

Miss Howe rose and, stepping to an old cabinet, drew open a drawer and took out some sheets of manuscript music. "These," she said, as she handed them to him, "are some Venetian melodies that I copied long ago. Will you try them for me on your violin?"

"With pleasure, if I can. I was just thinking of Venice; my last letter from my uncle was written there and I have not heard since. I do not quite understand, for he is such a regular correspondent and always tells me when he makes any new move abroad."

"Did he write about Venice in your letter?"

"Yes, but it is not as entertaining as his other letters which I have read to you. Uncle Hugh is a rather freaky individual in his correspondence. He never fails to write; but sometimes his letters are full of interesting things and then again they are scrappy. Shall I read you this one?"

"If you will." Miss Howe went back to the chair by the window and sat looking out while Gerald read. Venice was, of all the foreign cities, the one she cared most about. She had been very happy in Venice and it was there that she had herself played with Hugh Raymond the melodies which she now asked Gerald to try for her on his violin. He went over to the piano where the instrument lay and as he picked it up he snapped a string. While looking for another he fumbled in his vest pocket and accidentally pulled out the ring which he had placed there for safety. "I might have lost it," he said to himself, as he slipped it again upon his finger.

The music was not difficult, yet Gerald felt that he did not catch the spirit of it. "I don't get this one, do I?" he asked.

"Not quite, it is more like this," and Miss Howe hummed the air. "It is a boatman's song," she said.

"I see, it is the rocking of the boat on the waves that I miss," and he played it over again before he took up another.

"That is not the best one," interrupted Miss Howe, "perhaps I didn't give it to you. Wait a minute until I look in the drawer again." She went to the cabinet—and after a little search—came back with another sheet.

"Oh! this is a gondolied." Gerald took it eagerly and, oblivious of the fact that he had

been practicing most of the afternoon, began reading this new melody.

It was growing late and where Gerald stood the light was dim. "You cannot see there, I am afraid," said Miss Howe, turning toward him.

"Yes, I can see quite well."

"It will be better to come nearer the light—I will draw up the shades."

"Let me do it." Gerald sprang forward to anticipate Miss Howe and, as he reached out to the window, the sunlight fell brightly upon the ring on his little finger.

"Gerald!—" He turned back at the sharp exclamation—"Gerald, where did you find it? It is mine—the ring—it is mine."

Without a question, he drew off the ring and handed it to her. She grasped it hurriedly and held it to the light. Yes, it was the Raymond crest, cut in a fine heliotrope stone and on either side of the gold setting were characters which only she and the giver knew how to interpret. "Where did you find it?" she repeated.

Very quietly—avoiding any tone or look that might add to her intense excitement—he told her how he had picked it up in the sand below Castle Silent. "I will leave it with you," he said, and turned to go out of the room.

This recalled her to herself. "No, no, Gerald," she said firmly, "it is not mine. Forget

—you must forget—that I claimed it. It is very precious to me; but it is not mine." She pressed it back again into his hand, and, in another instant, he found himself alone in the tower room.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE GHOST MATERIALIZES.

The musical began early so that those who came from a distance and those who brought children, could reach home before a late hour. Vivian's forebodings gave place to a cheerful excitement, shared by all the performers and by all the members of the household. In good time all of the seats in the drawing room and library were filled—there were no delays—no interruptions—and the programme was finished in the time arranged for it. Then came congratulations, compliments, and, in some quarters, a pardonable anxiety to know the financial result.

"All that we need," announced Mr. Graves triumphantly; "now the house can be finished and permanent quarters assured to those little folks for some time to come. But you must be tired out here at The Beeches. Come, Lavinia, we must go so that they can rest."

They were tired, but it was much too soon for the excited performers to think of going to sleep. Mrs. Howe had retired, Uncle Earle was in his own study, and Miss Howe sat in a sheltered corner of the piazza, unnoticed by Gerald and

Vivian who came toward her talking in a low tone. Vivian was speaking:

"I saw the same thing before; the night Bay Beauty was killed."

"Why didn't you tell me then?"

"I supposed of course that you saw."

"Tell me, exactly."

"Why, when the light came again, I saw a figure—the figure of a man—against the window."

"And you saw lights again to-night from the tower room? It is moonlight now, you know."

"Yes, I know, but I am sure about the lights."

"Then there must be thieves trying to see what they can find. I'll ask Sid and Allan to go with me and find out."

"Won't you get hurt?"

"No. I won't let the other fellows take any risks, and it is my duty to protect my uncle's property when he is on the other side of the world."

Miss Howe tried to speak, but could not. At first she supposed that they saw her, and afterwards a conflict of feelings kept her silent. Was it her duty to dissuade Gerald from going to Castle Silent? Was there any danger to be feared? She did not believe that there was. She, too, had seen the lights; but she felt that it was the owner of Castle Silent who had set them burning. Gerald had not heard from him

for weeks and he had been known to come and go before in mysterious fashion. And if he were there? And if he should see the ring? What would Gerald tell him about it? She rose hastily and paced back and forth for a time—then seated herself where she had been in the shadow.

Vivian had gone directly up stairs and Gerald had found Sidney and Allan more than ready to take part in what promised to be an adventure.

"At last," exclaimed Allan, "we may find a foeman worthy of our steel."

"We may need some of the real article in that case," suggested Sidney.

"I have my revolver," answered Gerald, "and we shall not need more than one. We shall find only sneak thieves, and they are always cowards."

"I wish I had Nelson's rifle,"—Allan turned toward the stables—"I am sure he would lend it to me."

"The very thing," replied Sidney, "but Nelson is asleep by this time."

"I think not, there is a light in his room." And Allan started for the carriage house.

"Yes," called Nelson, "I'll give it to ye; but I calkerlate it's bad luck to kill a cat: ye better drown her."

"Who said cat?" But Allan did not enter into explanations, for he realized that the time

might be growing precious. "Now we are ready," as he returned with his weapon. "Forward march."

"There *are* lights, Gerald."

"Yes, Sidney, I see them."

"Some one is going back and forth in the library."

"That is the only place in the house where there is anything valuable. Uncle Hugh left a chest of papers there."

"Which is being rifled, I should say."

"Hurry up and let me rifle the thief," said Allan, pointing his weapon toward the house.

"Softly," answered Gerald, and without further word they walked rapidly, soon reaching the front of the Castle. The door stood slightly ajar: "Good," said Gerald in a whisper, "if I surprise him he will try to escape this way—the windows are all fastened. You just wait inside while I go to the library."

"Have your own shotgun ready."

"I will."

Noiselessly the front door swung open and was as noiselessly closed. Allan and Sidney took their motionless stand in the darkened hallway while Gerald made his way to the lighted room. A breathless minute which seemed an age, and then the exclamations:

"Why, Gerald!"

"Uncle Hugh!"

Allan ground arms with a bang that would have brought Mr. Raymond to the hall had he not been too astonished at the sight of his own nephew pointing a revolver at him, to pay attention to extraneous trifles. Gerald heard it and knew that the boys understood and would either wait for him or go quietly home as they felt inclined. He had something far too important on his mind to give further thought to them.

"So you took me for a thief," and Mr. Raymond laughed heartily as he comprehended the situation.

"Yes, but what brings you here now, may I ask? I wondered you didn't write to me."

"My plans were changed, and as I had to come back on some business, I ran up to get the drawings of this house; they were in my chest."

"You will finish the house?" Gerald was delighted.

"Oh! no. Stone, my architect, asked me if he might have these plans to use elsewhere."

"But, Uncle Hugh, why won't you build and live here a part of the time yourself?"

Gerald sat down at the table where the parchments lay and opened a sheet as he asked the question. Mr. Raymond stood looking down upon him.

"It might be well to tell you," he said, walking with rapid steps up and down the room.

"Yes," stopping an instant, "I was only a year older than you when it happened"—he walked back and forth again more slowly—"but youth is no excuse for such folly. You are not like me, Gerald—you are calmer, more self-poised than I was at your age, yet it may be well to give you the warning of my experience."

Gerald said nothing. He held the curling parchment open on the table apparently studying the lines and figures.

"This house," continued Mr. Raymond, "was begun for the loveliest, the best woman in the world, who was to come here as its mistress. I would rather not tell you her name, and what I do tell you must be locked up in your own mind."

Gerald bowed assent over the papers.

"We had a quarrel—that is I quarrelled. I was hot headed and unreasonable. If there had been any excuse it would have been different; but there was no excuse. It was all my fault—my accursed folly. One day she gave me back my ring. It was my one chance for explanation, for reparation. By my own act I lost that chance forever, and I have never looked into her face again. No woman's affection could stand such an ordeal, and she has long forgotten to care whether I am living or dead. Now you know why this house is going to ruin. It was for her, and no one else shall live here while I

live. And, having no home, I prefer to be a wanderer."

Mr. Raymond stood still noting the effect of his words. Gerald did not raise his eyes; he was gathering his forces for the ordeal before him. At last he spoke.

"If you are going back so soon, I should like to consult you about a little matter that puzzles me."

Mr. Raymond wheeled around to the window. Oh! the arrogance of youth. Here he had bared his very soul to save his kinsman, perhaps, from a life like his own, and with what result? No appreciation, no delicacy of feeling, only scornful thought, "a little matter that puzzled him!" With a forceful effort he controlled himself. "Go on," he said curtly.

"They have been no end good to me over at The Beeches," began Gerald, "especially Miss Howe, and it has happened that I have been thrown a good deal with her. It's the music partly, I think. I cannot play much, yet she always makes me play for her. Sometimes when I have been playing, your letters have happened to come and that is one thing I wanted to speak to you about. She asked me a question about you one day, I forget what, and I read aloud a part of your letter. After that she always asked if I had good news, and I fell into the habit of reading to her. As a consequence I

read pretty much all that you wrote, and perhaps I should apologize for doing so, although there was nothing really personal, you know.

"Your last letter was from Venice. I was in Miss Howe's study—a lot of us had been practicing up there, but the others had gone. She found some manuscript music, Venetian melodies, and asked me to try them on my violin. "That reminded me of the letter which I read, and we talked about it a little. Oh! I have forgotten"—Gerald interrupted himself—"before this Sidney and Allan, who are always digging for some reason or another, were at work in the pile of rubbish below this house. One morning when they were there, I jumped down from the ledge to join them and I saw this ring upon the sand."

Mr. Raymond turned from the window and took a step or two toward the table

"I told the fellows," Gerald continued, "that it must be yours and of course they let me have it. I didn't wear it at first, but when I was playing for Miss Howe I happened to have it on my finger. As soon as she saw the ring, she claimed it. I took it off and gave it to her; but, after she had kept it a minute, she made me take it back. 'It is not mine, Gerald,' she said, 'and you must forget that I have claimed it. It is very precious to me, but it is not mine.'—But, if the ring is hers, Uncle Hugh, what shall I do about it?"

"Give it to me."

As Gerald handed the ring, their eyes met—then their hands in a strong, warm clasp. "It is not late, is it?"—Mr. Raymond looked at his watch—and before Gerald could answer, his uncle had left the room. Without seeing the occupants of the hall, he passed quickly out of the door and took the path which led to The Beeches.

Miss Howe grew anxious waiting for the boys to return. At last she left her corner and, going down the steps, went out into the moonlight. Guard, who had been lying at her side, rose silently and followed her while she walked quickly to the turn which the boys must have taken on their way to Castle Silent. Further she would not permit herself to go; but she walked up and down, waiting and listening.

Guard trotted after for a turn or two, then he put his nose in her hand and looked at her inquiringly. He suggested that they should return; but when she called him back, he lay down and waited her pleasure.

At last a step—not the boys, for there were no voices. She stood on the edge of a little open glade, flooded by the moonlight, and she stepped back out of the light to see whether it should prove to be a friend or foe.

Guard stood up muttering a low growl. "Hush!" said his mistress, as Mr. Raymond

came through the trees, but as he crossed the open space the dog barked warningly. "Hush, Guard, hush," commanded Miss Howe, "it is a friend."

"Can you say 'a friend,' Margaret, after all these years?"

"It was my fault that we have not been friends," she answered, putting her hand in his.

"No, no, you shall not say that." Then, as he drew her toward him: "Is it true that you have asked Gerald about me? Have you really cared whether I were alive or dead?"

"I have always cared, Hugh."

"He told me about the music—was it our music that you asked him to play for you? I dreampt that was ashes long ago."

"It will never be ashes while I live."

"And the ring—your ring—I have no right to ask it—but—can you—will you—wear it again for me?"

Another moment, and Guard barked again; but this time it was a friendly bark, as Gerald with Sidney and Allan came homewards.

"We shall be lucky," Allan said, "if we do not find ourselves locked out;" and they walked on quickly without paying any attention to the dog.

"No, the door is open and lights are burning. This means," said Sidney, "that Aunt Margaret

is waiting for us; we must go right in and tell her that we are here." Not finding her, they waited, and in a few minutes Miss Howe came. "I am sorry we kept you, Aunt Margaret," said Sidney, "let me lock up."

"Thank you—good night—" and she passed on and up the stairs.

CHAPTER XXV.

END OF THE FAIRY TALE.

"He is perfectly splendid!" was the universal verdict of the girls, and the boys admitted that. Gerald had not praised his uncle by a word too much. As for Miss Howe, there was but one opinion—she was an ideal lady of The Castle, and they were most eager to know whether it was to be finished and when.

"Yes," said Mr. Raymond in answer to an inquiry, "I shall begin work at once and I regret extremely that I cannot oversee it myself, but I shall leave it in good hands while I am on the other side."

"You are going back?" Sidney glanced involuntarily at his aunt.

"I am obliged to go," said Mr. Raymond interpreting the look, "and your Aunt Margaret, who knows that I cannot break my word and that I will not go without her, has been good enough to say that she will go with me."

There was a simple wedding one morning at The Beeches, the very day before the lads and lassies scattered to their homes. Ruth said it was the only correct and the most beautiful

ending of the fairy tale which they had been living through the summer.

"Next year," said Mr. Raymond, "there will be no ghost at The Castle, and we ask you to promise that you will all come to the house-warming."

"I knowed if thet ring was found," said Nelson, "thet it would all come out all right. Some things ye know jest because ye do know 'em. Ye can't tell yourself, an' nobody else ken tell why it is; but ye jest do."

THE END.

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